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A Study of Primary School Teachers'
Understandings and Perceptions
of Teaching Reading

by

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for the Degree of Doctor of Education
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Abstract

The question of how children learn to read – including reading provision for children in English primary schools – has been the focus of increasing attention in political policy and academic research over the last three decades. Within this attention and associated discourses, too little attention has been paid to how primary school teachers understand and perceive the teaching of reading. In directly addressing this gap, this thesis contributes to the body of literature by examining how primary school teachers understand and perceive the teaching of reading within their schools and classrooms. The research examines how teachers draw on their beliefs and experience to influence their classroom practice, and how they make sense of the teaching of reading in response to policy. The study is underpinned by social constructivism as there is a consensus that social constructivism is concerned with empowering individuals to create and express their own understandings.

This qualitative study gathered data from a whole school focus group followed by individual non-directive interviews with four teachers currently working in mainstream primary education. Through this data, which included the use of concepts maps, the study examined how the social interactions and discussion opportunities revealed and informed the teachers' understandings of teaching reading. In addition, the study also looked at whether teachers' understandings were fixed or could be shaped by interactions. The data gathered on understandings of teaching reading was analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) drawing on themes from Baxter-Magolda's continuum as a framework to understand the different types of knowledge used by the teachers. The methodology offered the opportunity for the teachers to share their voice and critical reflections of their practice. The concept mapping method employed in this research revealed how the teachers see a clear partitioning in their thinking between policy and provision, and that the teachers felt part of their role was to address the gaps left behind by policy. This study presents rich descriptions of the teachers' experiences and the implications for teaching reading in the primary curriculum.

Key Terms: teaching reading; teacher voice; social constructivism; interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA); collaboration; concept maps; English primary school; teaching reading to children aged 4 to 11.

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Acronyms and abbreviations

AP	Analytic Phonics
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
DES	Department for Education and Science
DFE	Department for Education
EAL	English as an Additional Language
ERA	The Educational Reform Act
HMI	Her Majesty's Inspector/Inspectorate
HMSO	Her Majesty's Stationery Office
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
KS1	Key Stage 1
KS2	Key Stage 2
LEA	Local Education Authorities
NFER	National Foundation for Educational Research
NLP	National Literacy Project
NLS	National Literacy Strategy
NQT	Newly Qualified Teacher
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
PGCE	Post-Graduate Certificate in Education
PPA	Planning, Preparation and Assessment
PTA	Parent and Teaching Association
RWi	Read Write Inc.
SATs	Statutory Assessment Tests
SLT	Senior Leadership Team
SSP	Systematic Synthetic Phonics
SVR	Simple View of Reading
TA	Teaching Assistant
TACTYC	Tutors of Advanced Courses for Teachers of Young Children
WLA	Whole-Language Approach

1 Introduction

This thesis explores English primary school teachers' understandings and perceptions of teaching reading. While there has been a wealth of research conducted on the question of how children learn to read, there has been very little attention on how teachers understand and perceive the teaching of reading. In this chapter, I begin with a brief description of what this study understands the teaching of reading to mean, and then reflect on the rationale behind this study. Section 1.2 outlines the context for the research and details each of the research questions. In Section 1.3, I introduce the theoretical underpinning of the study and the methodological approach taken. Finally, I briefly outline the contents of each chapter.

1.1 Definition of Teaching Reading Used in This Study

The teaching of reading in English primary schools is often linked with raising national standards. Therefore, the focus of attention for teaching reading tends to deal with the business of what needs to be done to improve, with endless attention given to methods and materials (Bearne and Reedy, 2018). However, teaching reading involves more than simply instructing children with quick-fix methods to evidence progress. The teaching of reading to primary school children is about developing a far more extensive range of literary understandings than focusing solely on skills. Bowtell, Holding and Bearne (2014) suggest that reading as an act requires a variety of cueing systems to make sense of print, but becoming a reader is the interaction between the text and the reader, which chimes with Roche's (2015) belief that the reading process can stimulate the exchange of thought and ideas.

In this thesis, the teaching of reading relates to teachers teaching children from the age of four to eleven in English primary schools. The teachers taking part in and making contributions to this study were drawn from Early Years' practitioners to Year 6 teachers. Therefore, the definition of teaching reading within this study is that decoding and the retrieval of information are essential reading skills to learn. However, reading is a holistic activity that draws its influences much wider than

the confines of the National Curriculum. Reading traverses the traditional boundaries of literacy and draws on social, cultural, historical and political influences to expand children's ability to understand, interrogate and challenge what they have read to explore and deepen understandings of the worlds of factual information and fiction (Larson and Marsh, 2015; Roche, 2015).

1.2 Reflective Rationale

Although I now work in Higher Education as a university lecturer in primary education, my starting point for this research was the personal experience gained from teaching reading to primary school children. For the fifteen years I worked as a primary school teacher, I developed not only my own practice but also those of many new and experienced teachers. During this time, I evolved a personal style and pedagogical preference for a way to teach reading, as most teachers do (Baumann et al., 1998). My practice tried to provide a balanced and eclectic programme for teaching reading rather than following any one specific approach.

I have always kept records of notable incidents and events that occurred in my teaching in the form of a reflective journal, which to this day influences my practice. One particular event has stayed with me from early on in my teaching career. A child, who had previously been failed in the school reading system, found himself part of a daily group revisiting phonics work. The ten-year-old child had been given phonics instruction for five years, and had yet to learn to read. My reflective notes on the child describe how I moved him out of the phonics group, how we shared and discussed texts before and after school, how he was included in whole class discussions on texts, and how the child's self-belief, reading attitude and performance improved over a relatively short period. For this child, there was a route to reading, it was just not via the focus on the technical side of reading previously prescribed by the school. The incident prompted me to consider my classroom practice and to look further afield than the provision of the school at the time. Like many practitioners interested in improving their practice, I looked to theoretical perspectives and relevant literature on the teaching of reading beyond the reading scheme to see how these might inform my understanding.

Like many teachers, my reading lessons were planned based on the children's ability and a personal knowledge of how to develop their learning. In my first two years of teaching reading, my classroom practice was largely independent of any theoretical research-based perspectives. Poulson (2001) cites research which suggests that this is not an unusual approach, and that even if the teacher has a good understanding of learning theories, these are frequently not seen as particularly relevant to planning children's learning. An academic awareness of theories resonated with my experience, as I had an interest in learning theories and explored them for personal interest, rather than to inform my teaching of reading. However, when I was placed in a situation that challenged the practice of the school, I was more receptive to looking at and implementing alternative perspectives that reflected a personal view towards teaching and more specifically the teaching of reading.

Dewey's (1929) model of cognitive constructivism, which views the learner as an autonomous agent with individual objectives and priorities, resonated with my approach to learning and teaching. Vygotsky's theory of knowledge acquisition, known more commonly as social constructivism, was also firmly embedded in my teaching practice. Although, like Dewey, Vygotsky (1978) recognises environmental conditions as shaping experiences that lead to learning, Vygotsky's theory views the acquisition of knowledge as a socially constructed concept rather than an autonomous endeavour. Dewey's and Vygotsky's differences and similarities apart, they both remained a firm influence on my teaching practice. In my teaching, I emphasised drawing out what the children already believed and knew about their reading experiences. I then created conditions of cognitive challenge, persuading the children to reconsider and possibly adjust their understanding of their ability to learn to read. As a pedagogic tool in my classroom, Vygotsky's social constructivism was not just the development of where the children were at the time, but an understanding of their knowledge and experience gained, not only in class but from the wider community. As their teacher, I capitalised on the children's knowledge and experience to develop their reading further.

From a personal point of view, the work of Margaret Meek (1982) echoed a truth of how to learn to read. Meek places importance on the awareness that children develop readiness for reading at different rates. She also places importance on the exposure to rich involvement with quality texts,

reading for understanding, and moving on from focusing on just the individual word in pursuit of making sense of what has been read. The focus of Meek's approach is on understanding how children gain meaning from reading, an approach which was central to my classroom practice. On reflection, the priorities Meek sets out for learning to read were prevalent in how I learnt to read, and how my daughter learnt to read, and I have certainly shaped the love of reading with this approach with pupils who have passed through my classroom over the years. Meek (1982) argues that success in learning to read is dependent on the belief that the ability to read is an important thing to accomplish, and recognition of the independence, agency and power that literacy bestows.

Goswami's (2001) work on phonological awareness has also influenced my practice. The transparent links she draws between understanding the spoken language and one's readiness to learn to read written representations of the language is underpinned by an insight analogous to that of Vygotsky's theoretical practices with social constructivism (1978). The child's spoken language development involves the learning of sounds and combinations of sounds from conversations. A child learning through phonological written representation of such sounds will find it easier to learn phonological representations of actual words they have heard, where links can be made to the spoken language, than they will phonologically plausible but meaningless compounds (Goswami and Bryant, 1990). The influence of both Meek (1982) and Goswami (2001) intersected here for me, as both approaches rely heavily on spoken language. Meek, with her approach to reading a wide range of stories from the outset, is modelling the rhythm and rhyme Nutbrown (2011) identifies as an important aspect that emerges when children listen to stories regularly. The regular reading of texts out loud to children develops their understanding of spoken language while allowing them to discover how the spoken language is represented on the page. The children derive the pleasure of the stories, but also a phonological awareness of language that can later be translated to help them in learning to read themselves. Books for children, it seems obvious, are an essential part of learning to read (Meek, 1982). In addition, a necessary companion to books is an understanding of the language that the child is learning to read in (Goswami, 2008). Medwell et al. (1998) suggest that most practising teachers develop a philosophy of teaching reading, and I was no exception.

My awareness of approaches was based on teaching and a thorough understanding of the complications involved. As long ago as the 1970s Rumelhart (1976) was promoting the teaching of fluent reading through a combined approach, involving the integration of meaning and language with grapho-phonetic knowledge. Although other aspects of teaching reading are alluded to in the National Curriculum (2014), the teaching standards set for all teachers stipulate that systematic synthetic phonics (SSP) must be taught. The government, a proponent of the teaching of SSP, see this as a foundation which can be built on (DFE, 2011). This worries me, as the children who struggle with reading are often those from homes with lower levels of literacy (Belsky, Melhuish and Barnes, 2007). From my experience, reading provision built predominately on phonics provides only the very poorest of reading experiences. Therefore, a system for the teaching of reading that prioritises this approach appears problematic.

The schools I have worked with, in my role as a university lecturer, have all been in areas of high deprivation and typically have had poor levels of attainment. The students in these schools had some university coverage of a more balanced approach to teaching reading, but in the main, the focus was on systematic synthetic phonics. Therefore, my initial interest in researching how primary teachers understand the teaching of reading was in part to support students' initial entry point into teaching reading by developing an awareness of resources provided by school teaching staff. A natural progression for my research, therefore, was an interest in how teachers were receiving and responding to policy, and how policy aligned or conflicted with their understandings of teaching reading.

1.3 Context and Research Questions

Central to this study are the understandings and perceptions held by the teachers taking part in my research. It became apparent from my literature review that a great deal of research has been done on policy approaches and their impact. However, less emphasis in the literature has been placed on understanding how policy has been received and interpreted by practitioners. By overlooking this aspect, I would argue that a vital piece of knowledge is being missed in relation to teachers'

perspectives. The research in this thesis hopes to provide insight into what teachers in this study are doing in the classroom, how they respond to policy, how they respond to research and how they have adapted the research and policy to be a working model in their classrooms. We know that techniques for teaching reading are still evolving, and that there are many potential routes to reading mastery for children (Byrne, 1998; Roche, 2015). The focus of this study is on primary school teachers' understandings and perceptions of the teaching of reading. The understandings and perceptions the teachers shared on teaching reading did not relate to one specific phase area, year group or aspect of teaching reading. The primary teachers' responses in this research were based on their understanding of the term 'teaching reading' (detailed in Section 1.1). The research in this study seeks to share and reveal how teachers understand and describe their practice in classrooms through three research questions: What do teachers view as important in their teaching of reading? How do teachers receive and respond to the influence of policy in their practice? Are the understandings the teachers have fixed, or can interactions shape them?

Research question 1 (RQ1): What do teachers view as important in their teaching of reading?

RQ1 is based on the understanding that teachers draw on their own beliefs and experience to influence their classroom practice, and that collaborative opportunities will make visible their practical knowledge and understanding (Benner, 1994). The aim of RQ1 is to reveal often unseen teacher perceptions and to develop an understanding of teachers' experiences and everyday practices of the teaching of reading.

Research question (RQ2): How do teachers receive and respond to the influence of policy in their practice?

RQ2 seeks to make sense of the teachers' practice and evaluate their role in contributing to the understanding of teaching reading, not only within this research but as professionals who have something to add to the academic discussion. Whitty (2000) refers to teachers making judgements

concerning effective professional practice; RQ2 aims to reveal and share the teachers' experiences and working practice in teaching reading.

Research question 3 (RQ3): Are the understandings the teachers have fixed, or can they be shaped by interactions?

Underpinning the third question is social constructivism, as there is a consensus that constructivism is concerned with empowering individuals to create their own understanding and, through social interactions, exchanging and building alternative ideas and perspectives (Richardson, 1997; Wilkinson, 2003). Peskin, Katz and Lazare (2009) suggest that to reveal and comprehend the multiple understandings in research, the teachers willingly interrogate their practice critically, both individually and collaboratively, as meanings emerge in the process of social interaction between people. It was hoped that this study would engage teachers in reflective and collaborative thinking, beyond just story swapping, as Little (1990) encourages a rigorous examination of their practice as they potentially enhance and exchange their understandings both individually and collectively.

1.4 Research Approach Taken

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) characterise qualitative research 'as difficult to define clearly' (p.6), but also an approach which has no theory or paradigm that is distinctly its own. Being mindful of this, the theory underpinning the framework for this qualitative study was social constructivism, as the epistemological aim of the study was to question understandings of teaching reading. It followed then in taking a social constructivist approach that I would seek to describe and explain how people have come to their conceptual positioning (Wienberg, 2009). In recognising that the participants' understandings were potentially not fixed and that they could be challenged through discussion and reflection, the broad approach of this study was in agreement with Hacking's (1999) view in which social constructivist research, through reflection, is concerned with raising people's consciousness.

The aim of the study, from the outset, was to uncover teachers' constructions regarding the teaching of reading, and encourage them to reflect on and possibly challenge these (Guba and Lincoln, 1995). Within the design of a social constructivist study, it was necessary to use research strategies to elicit understanding, for the hidden meaning to be brought to the surface (Ponterotto, 2005). As Schwandt (1998) notes, data collection methods need to encourage deep reflection, and through interaction between the participant and researcher, challenge the constructs held by participants. With this in mind, careful consideration was given to the design of this qualitative piece of research. The methods chosen for data collection, and the approach taken for analysis necessarily needed to be coherent with the social constructivist design of the study, and meet the aim of uncovering primary teachers' understandings and perceptions of the teaching of reading. To ensure that the data collection methods were representative of the teachers' voices, concept mapping was chosen for its sensitivity to the participants' needs and as stimulus for discussion.

Qualitative concept mapping methods are grounded in the social constructivist perspective, with opportunities for participants to construct and reconstruct their knowledge through discussion, challenge and reflection (McLinden and Trochim, 2017; Molinari, 2017). Concept mapping data collection begins with the capacity to think together through an interactive process with colleagues to develop broader, common and shared understandings (Huberman, 1990). The knowledge constructed is representative of the participants' collaborative discussions and, as defined by Sutherland and Katz (2005), involves the bringing together of diverse views and values of multiple stakeholders in a clear and systematic way. The constructs formed are then used to build individual concept maps in which each participant begins to share their vision and expose their thinking with the influence of the co-constructed knowledge they were a part of (Rosas and Kane, 2012). In line with social constructivist principles, the participants often recognise new meanings and wrestle with ideas they did not consciously hold before (Novak and Gowin, 1984). During the participants' construction of concept maps, using the shared knowledge, the participants naturally talk through their

understandings. Communication is the most elementary aspect of any social learning system, representing the continued interaction with the process of thinking, challenging and reflecting on their understandings (Rasmussen, 1998). Trochim's (1989) original design of concept mapping does not include transcription of the participants' communication while constructing the maps. For me, however, this omission would have been a significant weakness in the research design, representing the loss of valuable evidence of their thinking and sense-making process. Bearing this in mind, the audio recordings (non-directive interviews) taken while the participants constructed their maps were transcribed and included in the research design. The transcripts were a valuable source of data in addition to Trochim's qualitative concept mapping methods, and were analysed alongside the concept maps using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA).

Interpretative phenomenological analysis sits on the social constructivist continuum (Eatough and Smith, 2008), and is concerned with a detailed examination of the process of one's making sense of experience. Eatough and Smith (2008), who formulated and developed the IPA qualitative approach, endorse social constructivism insofar as sociocultural and historical processes are central to how we experience and understand our lives. With this in mind, the analysis of the data in this research reflected a more social constructivist stance, in line with the constructivist claim that meanings are constructed by people engaged in the world (Crotty, 1998). The emphasis for analysis was on how the participants constructed, reflected and challenged their understandings, rather than the empathetic aspect of the interpretative strand of IPA, which is more concerned with the researcher putting themselves into the shoes of the participant in order to comprehend more effectively (Guba and Lincoln, 2005).

Qualitative research is diverse in its approach and offers a variety of routes to capture understanding. However, given that a principal aim of IPA is to explore how individuals make sense of their experiences, the adoption of IPA would, I felt, give voice to the individual, and provide an in-

depth understanding of the context in which they work. The personal approach of IPA would enable a focus on emerging themes and on the language used within the context in which the participants were working (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2014). IPA, as a qualitative inquiry, also welcomes the use of themes that have been drawn from theoretical knowledge (Langdridge, 2007; Smith et al., 2009), rather than relying solely on themes emergent from the data. Uncovering the understandings and perspectives underpinning teachers' practices was potentially problematic. Therefore, flexibility in the analysis was necessary to draw out the teachers' understandings in ways that reflected and captured the teachers' existing and developing perspectives (Smith et al., 2009). To analyse this social constructivist process, I constructed a table based on Baxter-Magolda's (1996) social constructivist continuum of knowledge construction to use as a reference point when analysing the data. Using Baxter-Magolda's criteria for analysis, I was able to stay true to representing the teachers' voice and critically analyse the data to construct an informed perspective on how the teachers constructed their understanding of teaching reading (1996).

1.5 Summary of Thesis

In this study, I investigate the understandings and perceptions on the teaching of reading held by four teachers who were practising at Appleberry Primary School. The research examines how teachers draw on their beliefs and experiences to influence their classroom practice, and how they make sense of the teaching of reading in response to policy. The study looks at the impact of social interactions and discussion opportunities, presented in the research, on the teachers' understandings of teaching reading. The study also looks at the understandings the teachers have, and whether they were fixed or could be shaped by interactions as they engaged in reflective and collaborative thinking about the teaching of reading.

In Chapter 2, I draw on Larson and Marsh's (2015) research to discuss the limitations of the National Curriculum and to consider reading as a holistic activity of intertwining cultural and social

differences, which bring personal understandings to what we read. I examine governments' interest in how reading should be taught in English primary schools. I briefly detail the historical context of government interest in education, before delineating educational policy from 1997 to the present day. I review existing research on the teaching of reading, and reading models previously and currently used in English primary schools. I look separately at the use of analytic and systematic synthetic phonics, as policy in this area is prolific and influential on how reading is taught throughout the primary school provision. I also review the influence of children's literature and reading schemes on the teaching of reading. In later sections, I consider the attitudes and views of parents and children's authors on the teaching of reading. I also review literature that critiques the national policy as an impoverished provision for the teaching of reading. Finally, I draw together the findings of the literature review and outline how the review influenced the formulation of my research questions.

In Chapter 3, I focus on the methodology and research design. I explain my research paradigm and what led to my choice of methodology. In the first section of the methodology I detail why I chose to use social constructivism as the theoretical underpinning for this research. I consider what influenced my choice of a qualitative and interpretative approach, and I explain the reasons for choosing interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) before considering the influences of other authors in shaping this research. I consider and compare traditions of qualitative interpretative approaches for a methodological framework and consider appropriate methods. Finally, I discuss the data collection process and how the data was analysed.

Having given consideration to the anonymity of the school and individuals involved in this research, each teacher was given a pseudonym and the school was renamed. In Chapter 4, I introduce Appleberry Primary School and the four teachers who took part in my study – Emily, Flo, Nancy and Ruby. I provide background information on Appleberry Primary School and Emily, Flo, Nancy and Ruby. I used interpretative phenomenological analysis to present and interpret the data gathered. Large extracts are included in the chapter to share the teachers' understandings of the teaching of

reading. I identified the emergent themes of *time*, *conflict*, *the questioning self* and *considered*. In the final section of Chapter 4, I discuss the master theme of *enjoyment*, which emerged in all the participants' transcripts.

In Chapter 5, I focus on capturing the teachers' understandings of teaching reading and how they made sense of policy in their classroom practice. To reveal the primary teachers' understandings, I applied Baxter-Magolda's (2004) knowledge continuum to deepen my analysis. The theoretical themes drawn from the continuum were: *absolute*, *transitional*, *independent* and *contextual knowing*. I look at how the teachers' understandings were confirmed, altered, and challenged through the process of discussing their responses to pre-generated statements while constructing concept maps.

In Chapter 6, I revisit each of the research questions in turn and discuss my findings concerning each of the questions. In addition to the discussion around each of the questions, I look at the findings related to the research approach. I discuss the contributions the study has made to new knowledge in revealing the participants' understandings on teaching reading and the impact the research has had on myself, Flo, Emily, Nancy and Ruby. The research findings reveal the teachers' understandings and perceptions of teaching reading and how the teachers see a clear partitioning between policy and classroom provision. The teachers felt that part of their role was to fill the gap left behind by policy and as such act as agents who are mediating policy with their own beliefs and understandings. The findings also reveal the teachers' propensity to engage with the collaborative opportunities presented in the research to extend their professional knowledge and to share thoughts and ideas that might otherwise have been left unsaid. Finally, I discuss the merits of further study and whether there is scope for research on a much broader scale.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of Chapter 2 is to examine some of what is known about the teaching of reading in English primary schools, and how what we know about teaching reading is prioritised by commentators, governments and teachers. The priorities and influences on teaching reading in primary schools have changed over time, so understanding the rationale behind the changes was essential for this study. Examining existing research and discourses on teaching reading is significant for our understanding of what the teachers in this research reveal about their understandings and perceptions of teaching reading.

Chapter 2 consists of six sections. In Section 2.2, I review the work of Larson and Marsh (2014) to provide an insight into the holistic view of reading. In Section 2.3, I examine governments' increasing interest in how reading should be taught in English primary schools. I briefly detail the historical context of government interest in education, before I delineate a timeline of educational policy from 1997 to the present day. Also examined in this section is the perception, remaining constant through successive governments, of primary schools' underachievement in the teaching of reading. In Section 2.4, I review existing research on the teaching of reading and reading models previously and currently used in English primary schools. I look separately at the use of analytic and systematic synthetic phonics, as policy in this area is prolific and influential on how reading is taught in primary schools. I also review the influence children's literature and reading schemes have on the teaching of reading. In Section 2.5, I consider the attitudes and views of parents and children's authors on the teaching of reading. In Section 2.6, I review the literature which critiques the national policy as an impoverished provision for the teaching of reading. Finally, in Section 2.7, I draw together the findings of the literature review and outline how the review influenced the formulation of my research questions.

2.2 A Holistic View of Reading

Larson and Marsh (2015) identify and discuss the limitations of the National Curriculum's linear model, in which reading concepts are introduced at specific ages. They argue that such a model, which draws on the work of the cognitive psychologist Ehri (1987, 1995) amongst others, assumes that all children acquire specific skills in a fixed, linear sequence. Larson and Marsh (2015) argue that the current National Curriculum model for reading is a reductionist pedagogical framework unsuited to the holistic nature of the acquisition of literacy, in which the importance of communication is a recognised tool grounded in social, cultural, historical and political practices. Larson and Marsh's (2015) *Making Literacy Real* captures the complexity of literacy and offers alternative literacy frameworks that traverse the traditional boundaries of literacy teaching and learning. They draw on a number of case studies that provide an illustrative glimpse of teachers' practice and demonstrate how the frameworks for literacies can become authentic learning experiences for children. Below, I discuss the alternative frameworks presented in Larson and Marsh's (2015) work: New Literacy, critical literacy, digital literacy, multimodal and artifactual literacy, space and play, and finally reframing sociocultural theory.

Larson and Marsh (2015) argue that 'new literacy studies are not a discrete set of skills to be acquired but situated within specific contexts and shaped by social interaction' (p.7). New literacy studies recognise the importance of a more complex social practice than traditional statutory curricula, and Larson and Marsh acknowledge that they may well prove to be challenging for teachers in the current political climate. However, it is clear from Larson and Marsh's case study in Gatto's¹ classroom that the challenges of recognising reading as a complex social practice can be overcome by adapting the curriculum in schools / classrooms to include teachers' and students' local literacy practices and their link to wider social aims and cultural practices. Gatto's case study provides

¹ Chapter 2 of *New literacy studies* by Larson and Marsh. Classroom Case Study – Lynn Astarito Gatto, Rochester City School District, USA.

evidence of how such challenges may be overcome, such as extended school trips which bring together the work completed in the classroom. Although Gatto was mindful of outside pressures, she built her curriculum on the basis of meaningful learning and authentic activities, which increased students' genuine involvement in cultural capital. Literacy practices change rapidly, but Larson and Marsh argue that literacy learning need not be restricted to the classroom, and they draw on the work of Hull and Schultz (2002) to argue that literacy learning occurs in everyday activities in multiple contexts and at different times.

In many respects, critical literacy draws on the notion that literacy is far more extensive than merely decoding the written word. Critical literacy, in line with the new literacy studies framework, recognises that a knowledge of the world and personal experience are as important as the influence of intertwining cultural and social differences. However, one of the most notable attributes of critical literacy is that it is strongly influenced by raising the critical consciousness of learners. Critical literacy is underpinned by the principle that dialogue is at the heart of learning and that analysis and interrogation of texts encourages children to draw on critical insights from their world to engage with their reading without the prior need to acquire a set of print-based literacy skills (Comber et al., 2007).

As the world responds to new technological environments, the development of digital literacy enables children to participate in meaningful, creative and authentic tasks, which develop the skills, knowledge and understanding needed to analyse and produce multimodal, multimedia texts. Larson and Marsh (2015) highlight the importance of digital literacy and acknowledge that there are challenges to the more traditional role of the class teacher in adopting digital literacies in the classroom. As Lankshear and Knobel (2011) reflect, this represents a move towards the teacher becoming the co-constructor of knowledge, with teachers and students learning together. In the ever-changing world of literacy, texts and images are becoming increasingly specialised as screens continue

to become more and more prevalent relative to traditional print media such as books (Kress, 2010). Similarly, Burnett and Merchant (2014) present a clear vision of the importance of encouraging and providing opportunities for children to move fluidly between online and offline spaces.

The increasing dominance of audio-visual material is central to multimedia texts, giving rise to the need for a greater depth of understanding of multimodality and artifactual literacies. Larson and Marsh (2015) draw on Pahl and Rowsell's² ethnographic case study to illustrate the many aspects that can be explored through multimodality, and look at how artefacts can be threaded across the school day to provide a multisensory experience to draw on many different ways of knowing. Similarly, it is clear from Taylor's (2012) work that children's multimodal communication affords insights into co-constructed learning and provides teachers with an understanding of children's learning progression. In reviewing the use of multimodality and artifactual literacies, the importance of children's interest is placed central to learning with a move away from the traditional model of teaching.

Larson and Marsh (2015) also highlight the importance of the relationship between play and space, and they review the social nature of learning in playful spaces where literacy and play are produced and used. In a time when play in the classroom is conceivably being pushed out of the curriculum or is just being used to support the curriculum and improve attainment, Larson and Marsh find evidence from Hubbard and Wohlwend's³ case study to view play and space as crucial for children to make meaning, explore their world and build their literacy understanding. Play and space literacy are an essential part of early childhood development, underpinned by the idea that through play children take up roles in literacy communities in a safe space and imagine themselves as literacy users through the creation of cohesive social groups and access to familiar cultural resources.

² Chapter 4 of *New literacy studies* by Larson and Marsh. Classroom Case Study – Kate Pahl, UK and Jennifer Rowsell, USA.

³ Chapter 6 of *New literacy studies* by Larson and Marsh. Classroom Case Study – Pam Hubbard, Iowa City USA, with Karen Wohlwend.

Through play and space and the provision of spaces of innovation and creativity, children build and rebuild various identities and discover new knowledge (The National Institute for Play, 2013).

At the centre of sociocultural literacy sits the role of the community and the participation in multiple communities of practice. From a sociocultural perspective, a community is not just the immediacy of the classroom but is expanded to include wider society, defined by Rogoff (2003) as groups of people with shared understandings, culture, values and history. Larson and Marsh (2015) recognise that there are challenges for teachers to build and maintain a meaningful learning community in the short time-frame of an academic year. However, in the case study of Murris⁴ they reveal how the shared engagement of children's literature can quickly provide a shared experience and can encourage children to make connections with much broader communities. By placing children's literature at the centre of lessons, the children engage with common communities and draw on cultural, institutional and historical aspects to make connections with their own life.

The literacy frameworks presented by Larson and Marsh (2015) adopt a holistic notion of literacy (Hall, 2003) that is far wider than the traditional classroom view. In so doing, they make a stand against the curriculum model of skills delivered in a fixed sequence, viewing the National Curriculum model as based on a reductionist pedagogy. For Larson and Marsh, learning to read is a far more social and complex practice than simply decoding words. As Hall (2003) argues, literacy cannot be simplified to just one model. In accordance with Hall's perspective, Larson and Marsh view literacy as a complex social practice in which children need opportunities to draw on personal experiences and to engage with wider communities to build and rebuild their knowledge and understanding in their reading. Larson and Marsh's work is informed throughout by the sense that communication, culture, community and collaboration afford relevance to children's critical insight through dialogue, multisensory experiences and lifelike contexts (Hall, 2003). They discuss the richness of possibilities in

⁴ Chapter 7 of *New literacy studies* by Larson and Marsh. Classroom Case Study – Karrin Murris, Western Cape, South Africa.

teaching literacy through a more holistic approach and explore meaning-making through children's interactions and engagement with a wide range of modes and media (Burnett et al., 2014).

2.3 Government Interest in Curriculum Policy

In this section, I look briefly at successive governments' increasing interest in curriculum policy. While the main purpose is to review policy from 1997 onwards, this focus needed to be prefaced with the increased government interest and intervention in the education curriculum in the second half of the twentieth century. Prior to the 1960s the focus of governments had been mainly on the restructuring of schools rather than specifically on curriculum intervention. Government interest in the curriculum content increased in the 1970s and 1980s. The Educational Reform Act (1988) marked a significant shift in policy.

Today, it has become commonplace for the government to shape and influence education provision against a backdrop of accountability for schools, leaders and teachers (Ball, 2013; Clark, 2017; Furlong, 2014; Wrigley, 2017). Over recent years, successive governments of all political persuasions have gradually moved towards assuming more control over the delivery of education in the United Kingdom (UK), from outlining what needs to be covered in the form of a National Curriculum, to how statutory requirements are to be achieved. Government interest in the provision of education saw a significant increase in March 1960 with the publication of the Crowther Report.

The Crowther Report (1960) examined what school children were learning. Most notably, the report raised questions about the standards being achieved in primary schools. However, the report and its findings arguably contributed to the politicisation of the curriculum, a process through which government has an influence over the curriculum (Bryan, 2004). The Educational Reform Act (ERA) 1988, which introduced the UK's first National Curriculum, marked a shift in the thinking of the Conservative government of the time, as the government placed itself firmly at the heart of educational systems *and* curriculum policy (Bryan, 2004).

The publication of the ERA by Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government laid the groundwork for more fundamental educational changes to arise, as Lawton and Chitty (1988) warned it would. The introduction of the National Curriculum (1988), which immediately followed the ERA (DES, 1988), became a turning point for how schools would now provide an education for pupils. The National Curriculum signalled that teachers would no longer have the autonomy to decide what was taught in state-funded schools (Bryan, 2004). The ERA (1988) and the introduction of the National Curriculum appeared to be a response on the part of government to a view that teachers had abused their freedom to the detriment of pupils and society (Whitty, 2000). The government intervention in the curriculum signalled that there was to be a move away from members of the teaching profession having a professional mandate to design the curriculum (Lefstein, 2008).

Much has happened in state education provision since the Crowther Report (HMSO, 1960), the Education Reform Act (DES, 1988) and the original National Curriculum (DES, 1988). There has been a trend for subsequent governments to increase the control and monitoring of education, including curriculum policy. Intervention gathered momentum following the election of the 1997 Labour Government. The first policy change in education the 1997 Labour Government introduced was the National Literacy Strategy (NLS). The significance of the National Literacy Strategy (DFE, 1997),⁵ the flagship education policy of the Labour Government (Bryan, 2004), was that the policy built on what now appears to be a seamless trend of government initiatives to improve the performance of teachers and outcomes for children (Ball, 2013). However, the introduction of the NLS signified that the government had entered into a new political territory, with the initiative specifying precisely *how*, *what* and *when* to teach literacy (Smithers, 2001). The implementation of the NLS, although never statutory, saw teachers follow a standardised method of teaching reading, and teachers' previous

⁵ The National Literacy Strategy (1997) was a directive for reading and writing lessons in primary schools. The NLS prescribed the structure, content, objectives, groupings and timings of lessons. The NLS removed the autonomy from the teacher by providing a national scheme, but it was never statutory.

understandings of teaching reading, however successful, were now to be superseded by the content of the NLS (Bryan, 2004; Cremin and Dombey, 2007; Goouch and Lambirth, 2007).

2.2.1 The Case for Change

Prior to 1977, government focus on schools tended to be on buildings and infrastructure rather than pupil attainment (Furlong, 2014). From 1977, however, the perceived underachievement of pupils in state schools and schools' lack of emphasis on English and Maths has been a continuous focus of attention from all incumbent governments, despite there being no firm evidence of national decline or neglect of these curriculum areas (Meek, 2004). The Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair (1998) was the latest in a long line of politicians to raise concerns about the political challenge of underachievement, proposing the notion of 'basic literacy' and referring, Meek (2004) suggests, to a 'fanciful time' in the past when all children could read and write. Shirley Williams (the Labour Government's Secretary of State for Education and Science, in office from 1976–1979) in 1977 suggested that 'essentials are at risk', a reference she linked to underachievement and the lack of focus on English and Maths. Margaret Thatcher (1981), then prime minister leading a Conservative government, continued with Williams' refrain that the government needed to 'attach a high priority to English and Maths'. Thatcher's successor, John Major (1993), re-established the need for a focus on English in his 'Back to Basics' speech, in which he advocated a return to traditional methods of teaching with a focus on grammar and spelling. This uninterrupted discourse on poor education standards and the ineffectiveness of teachers to teach literacy continued in the 1997 Labour Government's intervention. Labour's change of policy guidance was a pathway which, through the National Literacy Strategy, would see an increase in the standardisation of teachers' practice and professionalism (Evans, 2008, 2011).

The increased government focus on teaching English from 1997 – and more relevant for this research, the teaching of reading – was set in a particular political environment, one highly critical of

teachers' practice and which claimed that pupils' achievement was poor. In 1996, a damning Ofsted report on the teaching of reading in forty-five inner-London primary schools criticised existing practices (OfSTED, 1996). Mortimore and Goldstein (1996) argue that the style of Ofsted's report was significant, not just for its negative tone towards teachers, but because it also suggested that teachers did not have the subject or pedagogical knowledge to address the underachievement apparent in the London schools. The report's findings were a catalyst for change in practice in primary schools (ibid.), including the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy. John Stannard, a senior member of Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI), in 1997 raised concerns partly highlighted by test results, but also about the wider issue of the long tail of underachievement (Reid, 1997). Stannard did not state that standards in primary schools had fallen. Rather, he chose to focus on whether the expectations currently being achieved were set high enough for the government's rising expectations of pupils at primary school (Reid, 1997). Stannard was also the director of the National Literacy Project (NLP) (1995), and had launched the NLP initiative as a response to a growing concern about standards of literacy in English primary schools. Stannard and Huxford (2007) argued that the NLP was an architect of many of the features later adopted by the NLS, and he considers the NLP a forerunner to Labour's National Literacy Strategy (1998).

After the introduction of the NLS, an Ofsted (1998) report on the National Literacy Project further explored teachers' knowledge and understanding of the teaching of phonics across schools. It concluded that many teachers did not have sufficient knowledge and understanding of what a phonics component should be, and recommended a greater emphasis on phonics in teacher training. Dombey (1999) suggests that this was unfair, as the teaching and training of teachers to teach primary reading had focused on a more balanced approach. The teaching of reading had primarily been concerned with the construction of meaning rather than the sound/symbol relations of phonics (Dombey, 1999). According to Brooks et al. (1991), up until the implementation of the NLS, teacher education courses had been influenced by the increased interest in, and research into, a more

balanced approach to teaching English, and phonics had not been a primary concern at this time. However, despite competing perspectives as to whether standards were actually falling, the NLS was implemented by Local Education Authorities (LEA) in schools judged to be underachieving against the new expectations. One of the most significant influences on the use of the NLS document in primary schools was the use of the NLS as a tool for Ofsted inspections (Wrigley, 2003). Ofsted inspectors used the National Literacy Strategy as a benchmark for reading lessons during inspections, so schools were inclined to use the policy document to meet Ofsted criteria (Goouch and Lambirth, 2007).

2.2.2 Reading Models Used in Schools

By September 1998, 8,000 out of 17,000 primary schools were being directed by local educational authorities and Ofsted inspection reports to rethink their literacy strategies to fall in line with the government strategy (Pearson, 2004; Wrigley, 2003). Crucial too, was that the National Literacy Strategy advised not just *what* to teach, but *how* and *when* to teach, and also how to organise the classroom and the children. The 'Searchlights' model (Appendix 1), originally featured in Stannard's 1997 NLP, was accepted by schools as best practice in the teaching of reading largely as a response to Ofsted's endorsement (Goouch and Lambirth, 2007). The Searchlights model, which was holistic, put the text at the heart of learning to read, and used four sources of knowledge to illuminate pupils' reading processing skills. Dombey (2017) argues that despite the National Literacy Strategy's over-prescription, it did recognise that reading is a meaning-focused activity. Glenn (2016) argues that the Searchlights model drew heavily on Goodman's (1976) work on miscue analysis, and Clay's (1979, 1985, 1991) work on emergent literacy and four sources of information to learn to read. Clay described these sources as cueing systems and labelled them as phonological, syntactic, visual and semantic. The NLS remained the non-statutory government guidance for the teaching of reading until 2005.

Despite the National Literacy Strategy being government guidance for seven years, the government was concerned that many children were still not meeting national expectations (Vermes, 2006), even though children's reading attainment had improved (Figure 2-1). The Labour Government commissioned Jim Rose, a former HMI director of inspection at Ofsted, to review the teaching of early reading (2006). Rose's independent review on the teaching of early reading was to make recommendations based on the report's findings. While Rose acknowledged that reading is a complex activity, he simplified the teaching of reading to two essential components: decoding and comprehension. The two components were an attempt to reconcile two opposing camps in the teaching of reading (Dombey, 2013). According to Dombey (2013), the two strands, decoding and comprehension, represented Rose's Simple View of Reading (SVR) (Appendix 2). Rose's suggested model of a Simple View of Reading built on the work by Gough and Tunmer (1986), who had advocated a similar approach to teaching reading that placed a clear separation between the teaching of word recognition and language comprehension processes.

Rose's SVR model was compatible with the report's recommendation for the use of systematic synthetic phonics (SSP) over the more commonly used analytic phonics. Where analytic phonics were more conducive to the approach taken by the NLS and the Searchlights Model, systematic synthetic phonics is taught discretely. The SVR captures two principal ideas: reading comprehension, which is dependent on language comprehension abilities, and understanding written texts. Rose (2006) believed that the SVR provided a valid conceptual framework for the teaching of reading (Dombey, 2013). Rose also acknowledged that the model offered the possibility of separately assessing performance and progress in each of the model's two strands, which in turn could identify learning needs and guide further teaching (Rose, 2006). Wyse and Goswami (2008) critiqued the Rose Review, on the basis that it provided no reliable empirical evidence to suggest that synthetic phonics offered the vast majority of beginners the best route to becoming skilled readers. Similarly, Stuart (2006), an

adviser to Rose, expressed her concern about the reliability of the research evidence included in the review.

Existing research on the use of phonics at the time recognised the critical role played by phonics in the teaching of early reading but did not advocate one particular approach above another. The findings of Stuart (2006), for example, suggested that there is no one superior method for the teaching of phonics to English school children. Walton et al. (2001) carried out studies using a much wider range of school samples than the small sample taken by Rose, and revealed that no specific approach of phonics instruction was superior to another. Landerl (2000) and Spencer and Hanley (2003) reached the same conclusion, as did Torgerson et al. (2006) in their study completed around the same time as the Rose Review. More recently, Margaret Clark (2017) has argued that the benefits of systematic synthetic phonics are not supported by empirical research. In fact, states Clark, systematic reviews of existing evidence support only that there is a 'benefit from the inclusion of phonics within the early instruction in learning to read in English, within a broad programme' (p.20). In contrast, she claims to find no evidence 'to support phonics in isolation as the one best method', nor for the superiority of 'synthetic phonics [over] analytic or a mixture of approaches' (p.20).

Despite too little evidence of systematic synthetic phonics being a superior approach for the teaching of phonics, the government response to the Rose Review (2006) was to advise English state primary schools to put in place a discrete synthetic phonics programme (Wyse and Goswami, 2008). In response to the Rose Review, the Labour Government published 'Letters and Sounds', a phonics programme (2007) which gathered its influences from analytic phonics but also included a sequence of phonemes more characteristic of a systematic synthetic phonics approach. The Letters and Sounds programme was never statutory. However, the guidance to teach phonics discretely superseded Labour's previous government guidance on the use of the NLS (DFE, 1998) and the Searchlights model for teaching reading. This guidance remained the Labour Government's position on the teaching of reading until its defeat in the 2010 election.

The 2010 General Election failed to produce an overall majority government for any of the main political parties. The Conservatives won the most seats and after lengthy discussions were able to form a coalition government with the Liberal Democrats. A renewed focus on the policy and performance of schools, teaching styles, and the quality of the curriculum very quickly became the rhetoric for the new Secretary of State for Education Michael Gove. He argued that there were ‘hundreds of primaries, where the majority of children fail to get an acceptable level in maths and English’ (Gove, 2010). However, as detailed in Figure 2-1, the trend for primaries’ performance had been on an upward trajectory, as demonstrated by the performance of Year 6 children achieving national expectations in reading from 1997 to the change of government administration in 2010. Gove’s speech on reading at an early age, ‘The Key to Success’ (2010), potentially influenced the change to teaching reading practice, as Gove announced that there was to be a short, light-touch test, ‘as too many children were failing to reach expected standards’ (Gove, 2010). The phonics screening check, as it is now known, is an assessment of how Year one children read and decode words using systematic synthetic phonics. The screening check was introduced for Key Stage One children in June 2012. Gilchrist and Snowling (2018) argue that the government aimed to ensure that schools placed emphasis on the development of systematic synthetic phonics (SSP) skills in England. The screening check has had implications for teaching practice, especially regarding how phonics should be taught in schools. Clark (2017) suggests that the screening check’s format has almost certainly had an influence on how phonics is taught, as the screening check requires the children to use SSP to be successful.

The Coalition Government directive was to continue with the approach already put in place by the previous Labour Government, though the introduction of the check ensured that phonics would be taught discretely, if only to prepare children for the test. Prior to the introduction of the phonics screening check, schools had the autonomy to decide how phonics was taught in their school. The Coalition Government’s introduction of the phonics screening check, in the style of SSP, reinforced that phonics would now need to be taught discretely and that children aged six would be screened to

check that the teaching had been done correctly, with testing to begin in 2012 (Clark, 2017). The Coalition Government offered match-funding in 2011 for schools to buy training and resources from a government approved list of phonics resources suppliers (DFE, 2011), meaning that the choice of phonics materials was no longer at the discretion of the school.

In 2014 the newly revised National Curriculum (DFE, 2014) outlined the expectations for the statutory provision of teaching reading in English state primary schools. While these expectations included the discrete teaching of phonics and phonic knowledge as the route to decoding words, the National Curriculum document does not mention SSP explicitly. However, the guidance for the teaching of phonics is explicit in the National Curriculum, in that children should be able to read aloud books that are consistent with their developing phonics knowledge, but does not have the expectation that other strategies for decoding would be used to decipher words (DFE, 2014). The use of systematic phonics has swept aside previous understandings of teaching reading and overlooks the many potential routes to reading mastery, including the understanding that becoming a reader is a much more complex process than simply mastering phonic correspondence (Bowtell, Holding and Bearne, 2014). The 2014 National Curriculum now placed a priority on applying phonic knowledge for learning to read in Key Stage One (5–7 years old) (Clark, 2017). Goswami (2015) questions the effectiveness of separating out phonics teaching (decoding) from understanding (comprehension) as, she argues, the separation ignores a whole range of attributes that children bring to their reading and does not seem a productive way for children to learn to read.

Year	Government in Office	Policy and Report Publication Year	Percentage of Year Six Children Achieving National Expectation in Reading
1997	Election year – Labour Government from May	National Literacy Project (Conservative)	67%
1998	Labour	National Literacy Strategy	71%
1999	Labour		78%
2000	Labour	New National Curriculum	83%
2001	Labour		82%
2002	Labour		80%
2003	Labour		81%
2004	Labour		83%
2005	Labour		84%
2006	Labour	Rose Review – Teaching of Reading	83%
2007	Labour	National Literacy Strategy – no longer suggested as guidance for teaching reading. Government Publication of Letters and Sounds Programme in response to Rose Review	84%
2008	Labour		87%
2009	Labour		86%
2010	Election Year – Conservative/ Liberal Democrat Coalition Government from May		83%
2011	Conservative/ Liberal Democrat Coalition	Match Funding for Phonic Training and Resources	84%
2012	Conservative/ Liberal Democrat Coalition	Phonic Screening Test Introduced for Yr1	87%
2013	Conservative/ Liberal Democrat Coalition		86%
2014	Conservative/ Liberal Democrat Coalition	New National Curriculum	89%
2015	Election Year – Conservative Government from May		89%
2016	Conservative		66%
2017	Election Year – Conservative without overall majority		71%
2018	Conservative – without overall majority		75%

Figure 2-1 National Assessment Results for KS2 Reading 1997–2018

2.3 Existing Research on the Teaching of Reading in English Primary Schools

Many researchers agree that learning to read involves a balance of strategies (Bowtell, Holding and Bearne, 2014; Brown and Ruttle, 1997; Cremin, 2014; Goswami, 2001). However, there is to some extent no consensus that there is just one route that works with absolute certainty for every single person learning to read (Meek, 1988; Roche, 2011; Zucker et al., 2013). We can all bring to mind children, and to some extent adults, who have had difficulty learning to read. Goswami (2008) and Byrne et al. (2010) both state that the journey to becoming a proficient reader is a complicated and individual route, and necessitates the avoidance of a one-size-fits-all approach. Byrne et al. (2010) remind us that there still is not a theory of learning to read, and that if there was, reading would merely be just another instance of something easily accomplished. Rather, the teaching of reading is ever evolving (Roche, 2015). Learning to read is a highly complex process, which some children find difficult to accomplish, while others appear to approach with relative confidence and ease. With this in mind, the next section examines various perspectives on teaching reading, and begins to uncover why government policy has returned to prioritise phonics as the central approach to learning to read.

2.3.1 Teaching Reading Using a Phonics Model

The idea of teaching reading using phonics is by no means new, as argued earlier, but its prominence has been bolstered through political interventions, with a growing expression of interest from successive governments since 1997. Since the nineteenth century and Bell's (1805) introduction of an approach to learning reading based on learning letter names, sounds and sight vocabulary, the learning and teaching of reading have included some aspect of teaching sounds. Before the use of this early emergence of what we now know as a basal reading scheme, children who did have the opportunity to learn to read found the process arduous (Nutbrown, 1997). It is the legacy of the early ideas of teaching and learning that appears to have informed the teaching of reading as we recognise it today with the preparation of special books and supporting materials (ibid.).

As the review of literature and policy in the previous section suggests, successive governments since 1997 have all shown an interest in the teaching of reading in English primary schools. In particular, the attention has been on phonics instruction (Dombey, 2013) to the extent that phonics is now widely recognised as an essential component for teaching reading and to improve children's ability to read (Bowtell, Holding and Bearne, 2014; Dombey, 1999; Goswami, 2008, 2001). While there is a general agreement that the teaching of reading needs to include some attention to phonics (Clark, 2017; Dombey, 1999; Ehri, 2002; Goswami, 2008; Torgeson, 2006), there remains disagreement regarding various phonic approaches. An issue that has grown in importance since the government's mandating of the use of systematic synthetic phonics (SSP) to teach early reading is whether SSP alone is an effective phonics model for teaching reading in the English language (Goswami, 2008). To respond to this issue, it is necessary to examine and distinguish between analytic and systematic synthetic phonics.

2.3.2 Analytic and Systematic Synthetic Phonics

There are two main approaches to teaching phonics, systematic synthetic phonics (SSP) and analytic phonics (AP). SSP is an approach through which children learn to read the smallest component parts of the spoken language, phonemes, and learn to blend these into words. Phonemes are the smallest units of sound (phonology) of which spoken words are comprised (Figure 2-2). Teaching phonics involves developing an awareness in children of how the printed symbol on the page (grapheme) relates to the sound (phoneme), and it is taught using direct instruction (discretely). The SSP approach is taught in daily sessions where the children learn, in specific order, simple to more complex phonic knowledge. The SSP approach has a focus on phonemes (pure sounds) and does not encourage the pupils to use any other strategy to learn to read, especially in the initial stages (Dombey, 2013). As Meek (1997) suggests, such insulation is an impossible expectation, as children are learning words all the time from the rich print environment with which they are surrounded. In the SSP approach,

children move through the stages of acquiring some phonic knowledge before they access small prepared texts related to the phonemes they have learnt (Goswami, 2008). The use of SSP has been challenged, as supporting research is largely restricted to publishers of SSP materials and small-scale research with limited comparisons to other approaches of using phonics (Clark, 2017; Dombey, 2013). Goswami (2008) argues that there is some evidence that rapid progress in reading can be achieved using the highly structured didactic teaching of SSP, but she also argues that this rapid progress can only be attributed to doing well in the short term. Siraj-Blatchford and Sylva (2004) go further and suggest that any early gains made by using the SSP approach are short-lived, with any noticeable early differences diminishing within a year.

The analytic phonics (AP) approach is more consistent with the use of much wider influences than phonemes alone. The Letter and Sounds Programme (2007), published by the Department for Education under the Labour Government of the time, includes aspects of analytic phonics. Analytic phonics draws on a range of skills to help children learn to read, such as activities to help promote speaking and listening skills, drama and songs to encourage the children's imagination, recognising and learning of whole words, and phonological awareness. The teaching of analytic phonics is compatible with children who have already begun to develop an awareness of reading prior to formal instruction (Dombey, 2017). Analytic phonics builds, for example, on the basis that children have an awareness that written words convey meaning. Early examples of children's awareness could include a knowledge of environmental print and recognition of their names (Bielby, 1998; Dombey, 2013; Dombey et al., 1998). Morais et al. (1979) suggest that young children do not possess an awareness of phoneme connections but are likely to recognise that words may rhyme or that words begin or end with the same sound. Analytic phonics draws on the additional skills children have in identifying sounds to develop their reading skills. Phonemes are still taught and are introduced in a specific order, building up the young readers' ability to blend the sounds from the simplest to increasingly complex. However, unlike SSP, analytic phonics takes into account children's understanding and

recognition of syllables and their awareness of onset and rime (Figure 2-2) (Goswami and Bryant, 1990; Treiman, 1985). Goswami (2015) argues that young children often have difficulties conceptualising words as being composed of smaller units of sound, and although they may be able to distinguish syllables they struggle in hearing just phonemes.

Dehaene (2009), an advocate and supporter of SSP, sees the mastery of phonemes as essential groundwork which must be understood before anything else can be put in place. Dombey (2013) argues that in its extreme form, SSP permits no teaching of sight vocabulary. McGuinness (2006) suggests that children when learning to read often use the context of the text to help them decode the word, but this is another strategy that is not encouraged with SSP (Dehaene, 2009). Activities associated with early classroom experiences advocated in the Letters and Sounds (DFE, 2007) phase 1, such as listening to stories, singing songs, learning nursery rhymes and poems by heart, may be acceptable, but the view of proponents of SSP (such as Dehaene (2009)) is that they are not contributing factors in learning to read. There is a recognition of the value of whole word learning, syllables, onset and rime and phonemes with the use of analytic phonics, while SSP focuses exclusively on phonemes. Teachers of analytic phonics all draw on the patterns found in words (Figure 2-2) and recognise the value the experience of quality children's texts can contribute to the teaching of reading (Medwell et al., 1998). The isolated approach of SSP is not principally concerned with the construction of meaning, but with decoding words, which ultimately places understanding in the background in the experience of learning to read (Pearson, 2004). While there is some consensus that the inclusion of phonics instruction is important for learning to read, there is still some way to go to evidence that phonics alone is all that is necessary for young readers to become skilled readers (Clark, 2017; Ellis and Moss, 2014; Medwell et al., 1998). In the next section, I look at the use of children's literature and reading schemes and how they are used to teach children how to read.

Word	Girl
Syllable	Girl
onset-rime	g irl
Phoneme	g ir l

Figure 2-2 The hierarchical structure of the syllable – based on Usha Goswami's model (2007)

2.3.3 The Use of Children's Literature and Reading Schemes

It has long been debated whether the teaching of reading should have an emphasis on decoding with the use of phonics, or on understanding with the use of texts and language. In recent years the balance of teaching reading has shifted towards the use of SSP, discussed previously, and has been critiqued as being deeply flawed (Clark, 2017; Ellis and Moss, 2014; Wyse and Goswami, 2008). The criticism aimed at methods such as SSP is not that the inclusion of phonics should not form part of helping children to learn to read, but that SSP alone is not sufficient and that there are other integral aspects to learning to read. In this section, I look at how reading has previously had a focus on just the use of reading schemes and children's literature.

In the 1980s, there was an early indication that attitudes and approaches to teaching reading were changing, a change that put children's literature centre stage, with the aspects of language such as phonics occurring in the background rather than being taught discretely (Dombey, 1999; Pearson, 2004). The change in approach, recognised as the whole-language model, offered children a much broader and more interesting range of children's literature than had sometimes been used in the decades preceding the 1980s. The whole-language approach (WLA) is rooted in the apprenticeship model (Waterland, 1985), a method which worked on the premise that children could learn to read through language development and sharing books with adults. There is no doubt that teachers in the 1980s and 1990s had clearly moved away from the historic legacy of basal reading schemes and

phonics instruction, in favour of an approach more recognisable as Waterland's apprenticeship model (Dombey, 1999; Hannon and Nutbrown, 1997). The developments were a move towards the use of 'real books' using children's literature to teach reading. This approach required far more of teachers, and it required them to know much more about how children learn to read (Ellis and Barrs, 2005). The teachers would need to consider which books best supported the development needs of the children, and teachers also needed to have a broad knowledge of children's literature (Bearne, 2003; Ellis and Barrs, 2005; Hannon and Nutbrown, 1997). The move towards a whole-language approach gave a holistic unity to reading and writing as complementary competences, eliding the artificial boundaries between reading, writing and the spoken language (Pearson, 2004).

Another topic of ongoing contention is the divide between books for learning to read (reading scheme books) and other children's books (Rosen, 2016). Children's literature draws the attention of the reader to the language and how it has been employed in special ways. Books written for young readers reveal the creative voice of the author and often appear to be speaking directly to the reader. However, reading scheme books can be limited in their language choices, as the books build up a knowledge of words in a set order that often limits the narrative structure of the books. As Smith (1973, 1978) suggested, the WLA regarded learning to read as a natural process akin to learning to walk or talk. The motivation for learning to read was placed at the centre of the learning experience, through familiarity with books and stories chosen on the basis of the children's interest and the capacity of the books to engage and entertain, even if the books were too difficult to be read independently. Children were encouraged to decode unfamiliar words through their understanding of texts rather than the application of phonics skills taught over time.

Books designed specifically for learning to read, commonly known as scheme books, such as the Janet and John series,⁶ were often criticised as being artificial, stilted and offering little intrinsic value to engage or interest young readers (Goodman, 1976, 1986; Smith, 1973, 1978; Smith and Goodman, 1971). However, more recent scheme books, such as the Biff and Chip series⁷ (Capper, 2013; Solity and Vousden, 2009), have a number of factors that have contributed to their success. These include building on phonic knowledge and a growing familiarity of sight vocabulary as the learner works their way through the scheme.

The WLA meant that schools were choosing and balancing their choices between the systematic, logical sequence of the basal reading scheme on the one hand, and the imaginative narrative and emotional purpose of children's literature on the other (Bowtell, Holding and Bearne, 2014). Levy (2011) argues that reading scheme texts are crucial training materials for learning to read, and are a tool to teach the technical skills of reading. Although Levy (2011) admits that reading schemes have their place in learning to read, the books are often simplistic and limited in their language, given that they build on a knowledge of words and phonics the children have learnt previously. Roche (2015) warns that commercial reading schemes can potentially pose a problem, as the simplicity of the texts does not promote or develop enjoyment, particularly when compared to children's literature (Azripe and Styles, 2003; Dombey, 1998; Meek, 1997; Roche, 2015). Roche (2015) advocates unequivocally for a move away from the basal reading scheme as a resource, arguing that the scheme approach to teaching reading interrupts and 'ultimately stultifies reading for pleasure' (Roche, 2015, p.8).

Meek's (1997) view is that all children should have access to and are empowered by critical literacy. Otherwise, we are failing to educate the next generation properly. It is this meaning-making,

⁶ The Janet and John reading scheme was popular in the 1950s and 1960s. The scheme was one of the first popular "Look and Say" reading schemes. The scheme was published on licence from the USA by James Nisbet and Company.

⁷ The Biff and Chip series of books published by Oxford Reading Tree from Oxford University Press. The series was first published in 1985 and is still used in schools today.

where students seek to interrogate and understand authentic and meaningful issues and create their knowledge in their reading, which is thought to have been lost in classrooms today (Clark, 2017; Comber, 2003; Cremin et al., 1998; Leland et al., 2013; Meek 2004; Roche, 2015). The prescriptive nature of the government expectations has led to a rise in the use of commercially produced materials that often link to the curriculum content. The use of such materials potentially reduces teachers to technicians delivering other people's ideas (Leland et al., 2005) and possibly interrupts and numbs reading for pleasure and fails to develop critical awareness in the young reader (Roche, 2011, 2015). It is the overexposure to phonics, basal reading schemes, accompanying workbooks and the one-size-fits all style of teaching reading that concerns the campaigners for a much richer reading experience for children (Comber, 2003; Cremin et al., 1998; Goouch and Lambirth, 2007; Meek, 2004; Nutbrown, 1997; Roche, 2015). The development of oral language, critical thinking, love of reading and the ability to respond to literature through dialogue and discussion are all seen as being at risk within a narrowed approach to teaching reading (Clark, 2017; Comber, 2003; Cremin et al., 1998; Meek, 2004; Roche, 2015).

Being critically literate is an essential skill for everyday life. Literacy is learning to read the world by developing social, political and cultural criticism (Roche, 2015). Roche's concern is that pupils will not develop the skills to interrogate and understand authentic and meaningful issues without the use of real books to facilitate and develop discussion skills. She argues that, through children's literature, children create an understanding and knowledge about the world which surrounds them. Often children's worlds are limited by their social and cultural experiences, and ordinarily can exclude children from experiencing and knowing much wider opportunities. However, through children's literature, worlds from which they may find themselves excluded, await and are accessible through the pages of narrative and within the rich descriptions of non-fiction. Children's literature is more than a mechanism to learn to read; it is also quality literature that can develop children's interest in the world around them and enrich their lives in considerable ways (Cliff-Hodges, 2010). Overlooking

the inclusion of children's literature to teach children to read creates more than a void in their reading development; it also means missed opportunities to understand and question the world. The concerns raised about the teaching of reading and the impoverished provision (Roche, 2015) of the National Curriculum centre on its neglect of children's critical and independent thinking. By separating reading skills out into isolated teaching episodes and moving towards teaching from templates and pre-prepared materials, the opportunities or interest for children to question what they are reading are limited (Leland et al., 2005). Opportunities need to be created in the classroom for the young critical reader to develop the skills to question the media-driven world they are growing up in, which could potentially be overlooked in the classroom. The generation of children exposed to the National Curriculum needs to be taught such skills and encouraged to develop a critical voice to ask the big questions about life (Brookfield, 2012). Such big questions include those such as: What effects does this have on me as a reader? Who has produced the text? How could it be told differently? What's missing from this account? Jewett and Smith (2003) argue that effective literacy draws on a repertoire of practices that allow learners to engage in reading to act as code breakers, meaning makers, text users and text critics. The 'text critics' element appears to have no reference in the National Curriculum, yet I would argue is an essential skill to achieve well in both reading and national tests.

While there is a consensus, as discussed above, that children's literature is an essential aspect for children to learn to read, there is also a recognition that the use of some phonological awareness is also crucial (Dombey, 1999). In the next section, I look at the public's perception of teaching reading, and I consider the influence government policy might have had on the support parents give to their children.

2.4 Public Perception of Teaching Reading?

In this section, I look briefly at attitudes to teaching reading beyond the classroom and academic research. I consider the influence government policies may have had on the support parents give to

their children at home with reading. I also look at the opinions of two children's laureates who have challenged the government guidance on the teaching of reading and who warn of potential losses to children's understanding and pleasure in reading.

2.4.1 Parents' Perception

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1997) research suggests that there have been a limited number of studies that have examined parents as an influential factor in developing reading achievement. Huntsinger, Jose and Luo's (2016) research found that some parents contributed to their children's ability to read by providing literacy experiences at home. Such support was found to be varied, but the main finding was that parental storybook reading contributed to children's success in school-based literacy instruction (Dearing, Weiss, Kreider and Simpkins, 2004; Hindman and Morrison, 2011; Saracho, 2012; Shapiro, Anderson and Anderson, 2002). Bojczyk, Davis and Rana's (2016) recent study revealed how mothers' instructive behaviours during story time had an impact on the children's language development and how the sharing of a storybook with their child supported children's literacy. The mothers' reading strategies used during shared storybook reading affected the children's readiness to learn to read and their vocabulary (Bojczyk, Davis and Rana, 2016). The public perception of teaching reading and support given by parents at home with their children is difficult to measure. However, some indication of how parents support their children towards reading proficiency can be gauged from parents' commentary and involvement on social media and resources they buy to support their children's reading at home.

When the phonics screening check was introduced in June 2012, parents responded by looking for ways to support their children with preparation for the check (Clark, 2017). Bearne and Reedy (2018) suggest that some parents are aware that young children's reading achievement is closely related to their academic success. The website www.mumsnet.com (2017), a forum aiming to help parents on all parenting issues, has several pages dedicated to supporting children with phonics at

home. The text on the website is provided by Pearson, an educational supplier of phonics programme resources. The information available for parents attempts to remove the mystery on the formulaic approach of systematic synthetic phonics as an approach to teaching reading. Very little space is given in Mumsnet's online literature to suggest that other approaches at home might be beneficial to enhance children's reading. Parents comment on the SSP approach and offer other parents advice on purchasing phonics materials. There is a forum commentary from the parents online on the problems and successes they have had with the use of SSP materials at home.

One possible explanation for parents seeking help in order to support their children with systematic synthetic phonics at home is that schools are requesting that SSP work to be done at home (Ofsted, 2017). Rosen (2014) argues, however, that the promotion of children's literature and the importance of sharing books is not as well communicated to parents. There is a wealth of evidence to suggest that sharing books regularly with parents and owning a small collection of books at home can lead to higher engagement in reading (Comber, 2003; Cremin et al., 1997; Leland et al., 2013; Meek, 2004; Roche, 2015; Ryan and Deci, 2000; Wigfield and Guthrie, 1997). As Roche (2015) suggests, a higher engagement with books leads to breadth of reading, curiosity and involvement with texts, all of which are necessary for reading skills beyond the phonics screening check.

2.4.2 Children's Authors' Perceptions

The government's focus on SSP has received extensive criticism from leading children's authors. Michael Rosen, a prolific children's author, academic, children's laureate (2007–2009), and political commentator favouring a much broader approach to learning to read, has long been a critic of the government guidance for teaching reading in primary schools. Rosen has warned of the long-term effects of neglecting the broader reading skills in favour of reading strands that can be easily measured (Rosen, 2014). Rosen is an advocate of bedtime stories, sharing a book for pleasure with a parent, conversations and playing with language, all of which he contends compete to be heard

against a backdrop of how successful phonics is for learning to read. Rosen argues that the government has spent in excess of £46 million of public money on providing training and resources for SSP, which could have been devoted to providing facilities, books and training to encourage children to read for pleasure (Rosen, 2014). Rosen's message echoes the opinions of academics such as Clark (2017), Ellis and Moss (2014), Wyse and Goswami (2008), all of whom claim that a daily diet of phonics alone will not develop skilled readers who will be able to read for understanding and pleasure (Rosen, 2014). Julia Donaldson, Children's Laureate 2011–2013, herself an author of phonics resources materials and children's author, agrees with Rosen and acknowledges that the pendulum towards phonics has now swung too far. She suggests that it is better to teach children to read using a variety of approaches (Donaldson, 2013).

Ruth Miskin, the producer and author of Read Write Inc., a systematic synthetic phonics programme, widely adopted and used in schools and often implemented systematically and rigorously, is a devotee of the SSP approach (Clark, 2017). However, her latest training materials move away from the core principles of systematic synthetic phonics and include non-phonological materials (Rosen, 2017). Miskin's latest range of phonics materials (Miskin, 2017) includes carefully selected non-phonological texts written by other authors, a move which Rosen (2017) suggests is a balanced approach to teaching reading, more in line with the Searchlights model discussed previously. Miskin's inclusion of non-phonological materials in her latest Key Stage One resources is significant, as Miskin was the vanguard for the introduction of SSP. Miskin has worked closely with the government in various advisory positions since 1997, and as Clark (2017) argues has had an influence over government thinking on the teaching of English and more prominently the teaching of reading. Clark (2017) further contends that Miskin is part of a group that has commercial interests in determining government policies, the materials recommended and even influence over the supplementary funding for the teaching of reading. A difficulty for Miskin's switch to include non-phonological literature in teaching resources for SSP is all the more significant, as her new materials are a move

away from the current government guidance. There is no explanation for Miskin's change of provision, but the switch must be an indication that Miskin's team are exploring the notion that, potentially, essential components of learning to read were missing from the original SSP teaching materials (Rosen, 2017).

2.5 The Risks of an Impoverished Reading Provision

In this section, I examine research that considers how policy could be narrowing the reading experiences for children. I also reflect on whether the disjointed approach of teaching decoding and comprehension separately is having an impact on national attainment. Finally, I consider briefly whether policy on the teaching of reading is having an impact on teachers' autonomy and understandings in the classroom.

As previously outlined, critics of systematic synthetic phonics and the National Curriculum guidance for teaching reading suggest that we are at risk of narrowing reading experiences for the generation of children in schools (Clark, 2017; Roche, 2015). With the pressure on teachers to meet targets and with the excessive focus on the sub-skills of reading, all carefully monitored by the government at set assessment marker points, it is conceivable that teachers could lose sight of the fact that they are teaching reading for its communicative purpose rather than to raise attainment evidenced through national tests (Pearson, 2004). Mercer and Littleton (2007) argue that the deconstruction of reading into sub-skills is setting up artificial boundaries between 'decoding and comprehension' and 'engagement and discussion'. Dombey (2017) reflects on the developing practices for teaching reading and suggests that the provision is increasingly concerned with the accrual of disjointed skills and knowledge rather than the holistic purpose served by those parts of becoming an accomplished reader.

The pressure in primary schools to improve reading outcomes is ongoing, but there is a danger that what is being measured is leading to a compromised provision of reading in schools (Roche,

2015). The teaching of a discrete set of skills and competencies is easy to monitor, analyse and use to indicate performance, but it is not clear that the approach improves the reading skills of children. The inclusion in the National Curriculum's (2014) statutory guidance for pupils to be taught to 'develop pleasure in reading and motivation to read' (2014, p.8) could arguably be overlooked and given a lower priority as government attention is on aspects of reading that can be measured (Roche, 2015; Clark, 2017). There is no way to test children's pleasure and motivation to read, as reading for pleasure is about so much more than the retrieval of facts, being connected to the broader, holistic development of the child (Burnett and Merchant, 2018). Therefore, part of the statutory guidance in the curriculum could potentially be narrowed to facilitate more time for the teaching of comprehension strategies likely to feature in comprehension tests.

Interestingly, the 2016 KS2 national assessment test results for reading revealed a decline in recent cohorts' attainment in the tests (Figure 2-1). The 2016 cohort (Year 1 in 2011) would have most likely been exposed to a more extensive emphasis on phonics in comparison to previous years. This decline in the Key Stage Two assessment score was the first significant fall in attainment in national reading for KS2 for nearly twenty years, and the conflicting result could be associated with the nature of the approach taken to teaching the cohort in Early Years and Key Stage 1 (Wrigley, 2017). In the 2017 results, there was a slight improvement to KS2 data, but the national figure for reading attainment fell short in comparison to the attainment figures prior to the implementation of SSP. The 2017 results chime with the NFER's independent evaluation of the impact of the phonics screening check conducted three years previously: 'There were no improvements in attainment or in progress that could be clearly attributed to the introduction of the check, nor any identifiable impact on pupil progress in literacy for learners with different levels of prior attainment' (NFER, 2014, p.67).

In agreement with Comber (2003), Bearne and Reedy (2018), Cremin et al. (1997), Clark (2017), Leland et al. (2013), Meek (2004), Roche (2015) and Ryan and Deci (2000), I would suggest that government guidance on the teaching of reading promotes impoverished teaching provision for

children learning to read. Clark (2017) suggests that the pressure on schools is having a significant impact on teachers' professional freedom, and removing teachers' autonomy to adjust their teaching appropriately for the individual children they teach. The assumption that teachers are willingly giving up their independence in the classroom in favour of schemes and restrictive phonic programmes seems an incomplete picture of practice in primary classrooms. Without asking individual teachers what they prioritise in the classroom, what they include, and what they exclude, we cannot possibly understand the complexity of their understanding of the teaching of reading or how they have responded to policy and initiatives.

2.6 This Research and Why It Is Necessary

The government, through policy and standardised testing, shapes how reading is taught in English primary schools. What appears to be unknown is the impact the regulatory guidance has had on teachers' understanding and perceptions of teaching reading. As a teacher, who has only recently left the profession, my professional development took place during a period of heavy government initiative and guidance. I entered the teaching profession as a newly qualified teacher (NQT) the same year the NLS was rolled out to schools. For the entirety of my teaching career, the government has to some extent guided *what* and *how* reading is taught in schools. Despite the government directives, however, behind the closed door of my classroom there was room for agency and flexibility in my teaching. I was not restricted to the structure of the National Literacy Strategy (1998), the use of a phonics scheme, a basal reading scheme, educational resources to practice comprehension questions, or following just the statutory guidance in the National Curriculum of the time. The practice in my classroom was a rich learning environment that aligned with national and local requirements for accountability purposes, but I used my professional judgement to make decisions on how the latest statutory guidance could be implemented in my classroom. For example, I considered how to respond to the initiatives yet remain focused on responding to and providing the best whole reading

experience for my class (Jewett and Smith, 2003). The understandings teachers have and how understandings are formed at a micro level are very seldom investigated, but essential to know if we are to understand how teachers manage and implement policy and practice in their classrooms. If Medwell et al. (1998) are correct in their evaluation that effective teachers do not merely follow guidelines but are reflective individuals who make principled decisions informed by their practice, by what they have read, and courses they have attended, then teachers' understandings of their classroom practices are potentially a undervalued source of knowledge about the teaching of reading. Clark (2017) argues that the dictates of the DFE and Ofsted have put pressure on teachers to achieve an increasing pass rate. The pressure to perform in line with extensive guidance from the government on how to teach reading is having a major impact on practice in schools, as well as impacting on teacher training (ibid.). According to Clark (2017), 'This has removed the professional freedom for teachers to adopt the approaches they think appropriate for individual children' (p.11). A significant question arises from Clark's view, insofar as classroom teachers' understandings of teaching reading have received little academic attention. Therefore, it is difficult to know with any certainty the approaches teachers adopt in their classroom and to what extent their professional freedom is compromised.

From a review of the literature on teaching reading, it is apparent that a great deal has been researched concerning policy, approaches and their impact. What emerged from the literature review is that government intervention in the teaching of reading appears to have consistently increased. The gradual increase of government control over what and how reading is taught in English primary schools began with the 1997 Labour Government's National Literacy Strategy (NLS) policy for teaching English (Bryan, 2004). Although the NLS guidance was never statutory, Wrigley (2003) argued that the policy was enforced through Ofsted, insofar as a school that did not adopt the NLS and was judged to be failing would be put under significant pressure regarding results. The Coalition Government (2010) shaped the teaching of reading in English primary schools further by introducing a light-touch check

on phonics. The phonics screening check specifically tested children's ability to use pure sounds, phonemes, and although at the time it was not statutory guidance to use SSP, the government's funding for resources, training and a national test set a clear agenda for schools. Wrigley (2017) suggests that the school funding and phonics check was not on whether to use phonics to teach reading, but that the phonics check was instead specifically designed to promote the teaching of systematic synthetic phonics. The implications for schools were that the results of the 'light-touch check', as originally announced by the then Education Secretary Michael Gove, was to become part of the data Ofsted would use to evaluate schools (Wrigley, 2017). Government intervention increased further in 2014 with the release of the latest version of the National Curriculum making it statutory that phonics should be taught to children first and discretely. Iverson et al. (2017) argue that the pressure placed on schools with high stakes testing results in a restrictive and impoverished curriculum for children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Ball (2013) argues that teachers are inevitably the implementers and mediators of education policy, with their autonomy restricted within an education system of attainment and accountability. An interesting question that emerges from Ball's argument is how teachers reconcile their understandings of teaching reading while implementing national policy. If Wrigley (2017) is right in his assumption that skilful teachers know how to combine various techniques to be effective teachers of reading, based on their understandings, they will also have, as Medwell et al. (1998) suggest, the ability to prioritise and balance policy with their understandings and perceptions of teaching reading. Research to date has tended to focus on the implications of government policy, with some consensus emerging on how reading should be taught, but less emphasis has been placed on what teachers understand about the teaching of reading and how teachers receive and respond to policy. By overlooking teachers' understandings, a vital piece of knowledge on how to teach reading is missing.

As more and more time is taken over by statutory guidance on the teaching of reading, there is a narrowing of time available for teachers to exercise the autonomy to implement their understandings

and perceptions on the teaching of reading (Wrigley, 2017). Ball (2013) argues that government policy is increasingly influential in education, with high levels of accountability placed on teachers, schools and local authorities. The policies influencing the practice of teaching reading are built on isolated reading skills, conflicting ideas, interests, and political agendas (Wrigley, 2017), and arguably place artificial boundaries around what is understood about the teaching of reading. Against such a backdrop it seems increasingly important to gain a clear picture of English primary school teachers' understandings and perceptions of teaching reading. Three interesting questions emerge from this literature review: What do teachers view as important in their teaching of reading? How do teachers receive and respond to the influence of policy in their practice? Are the understandings the teachers have fixed or can they be shaped by interactions?

3 Methodology and Research Design

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of Chapter 3 is to establish, justify and explain the methodological basis of the study. In Section 3.2, I detail why I chose to use social constructivism as the theoretical underpinning for this research. I examine the influences of my choice of a qualitative and interpretative approach, and I explain the reasons for choosing interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) before considering the influences of other authors in shaping this research. Section 3.2 also provides an outline of the two research methods used in this study and justifies why they are appropriate as data collection methods. Section 3.3 describes the data collection process, including information about the research participants, the school in which the research took place and the research collection events. Section 3.4 describes the analytic process used to analyse the collected data. Finally, sections 3.5 and 3.6 outline the principles of validity and ethical considerations applied to this piece of qualitative research.

A reminder of my research questions:

- *What do teachers view as important in their teaching of reading?*
- *How do teachers receive and respond to the influence of policy in their practice?*
- *Are the understandings the teachers have fixed or can they be shaped by interactions?*

3.2 Methodology

3.2.1 Theoretical Underpinnings

Given that the overall purpose of this thesis, framed around the research questions, concentrated on exploring and representing a group of teachers' professional expertise and their understandings of teaching reading, social constructivism naturally formed the core theoretical underpinnings of this

study. In a time where policy often drives what is understood about the teaching of reading (Wrigley, 2017), I wanted to explore the notion of teachers' understandings and perceptions of teaching reading in the context of how teachers respond to these external pressures, including the agency they have in shaping their beliefs and practices. Social constructivism does not necessarily lend itself to all academic research or fields of enquiry, but it is argued that social constructivism is the dominant teaching and learning paradigm (Holstein and Gubrium, 2008). Social constructivism's epistemological foundations resonate with the aims and intentions of this research. Specifically, social constructivism's view that people are immersed in shared, authentic meaning-making that is personal and related to genuine problems of an intellectual and professional kind aligned perfectly with the view of teachers' activity considered in this thesis. The research questions were exploratory, as an aim of the study was to work collaboratively with the teachers to make sense of their experience and allow a depth of understanding to be revealed. Underpinning the research with social constructivist principles ensured that individual, shared, and multiple perspectives were represented. Careful consideration was given to the data collection methods, as there needed to be opportunities for interaction between what participants already knew and believed with the engagement of potentially different understandings held by their colleagues. As Kelly (2006) suggests, a social constructivist approach gave teachers the opportunity not only for individual construction and reconstruction of knowledge, but also for collaborative experiences to engage with differing perspectives. Applying social constructivist principles to this research encouraged the teachers to examine their own beliefs about the teaching of reading, and provided an opportunity to challenge their perceptions within a supportive and discursive environment.

Richardson (1997) argues that there is consensus around the idea that social constructivism is concerned with enabling individuals to create their understanding based on an interaction between what they already know and believe and new ideas presented from social interactions. Similar to Dewey's (1929) model of 'cognitive constructivism', the framework for the present research was

designed to give the teachers an individual voice, which portrayed the individual as an autonomous agent with distinct objectives and priorities. Advocates of constructivism place a great deal of weight on the individual, as well as their personal experiences, as an influence on their learning (McLeod, 2009). However, Ashwin et al. (2015) remind us that interpretations of constructivism sit on a continuum, with some placing more emphasis on the social and collaborative dimensions, and recognising the influence of shared experiences. In recognition that individuals create understandings based on interactions, I also applied the Vygotskyian (1978) theory of social constructivism, in which the acquisition of knowledge is often socially constructed (Hyslop-Margison and Strobel, 2008). In my study, the teachers had the opportunity through social interactions to consider and talk about their practice and exchange and build alternative ideas and perspectives. It was important, therefore, that the data collection methods and analytic approaches (discussed later in this chapter) selected for this research were mutually cohesive with social constructivism and facilitated the teachers' ability to reflect, consider and to some extent challenge their practice. Social constructivism translates into enabling teachers to make sense of their practice and to grow intellectually and professionally through their interactions (Kroll, 2004).

3.2.2 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

The social constructivist framework underpinning this study necessitated an interpretative and qualitative approach, as the research questions were exploratory. Flexibility was required in the research approach to meet the aims of working collaboratively with the teachers. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), with its roots in social constructivism, gave voice to the individual and allowed me to obtain an in-depth understanding of the context in which they work. The principles of IPA are focused on how individuals make sense of the world, with data collection thus being contextually situated (Charmaz, 2006). As noted by Smith and Osbourn (2008), the principles of IPA link with the intention of gaining a deep understanding of the participants' experiences. The

qualitative data developed through IPA typically offers a personal account with direct quotes being used to substantiate findings (Pringle et al., 2011). As Willig (2001) suggests, IPA provides more room for creativity and flexibility in the research design than other qualitative approaches. In agreement, Smith et al. (2009) note that the non-prescriptive nature of IPA offers adaptability for the researcher and the researched through an approach that values the importance of individual accounts and enables a holistic approach (Pringle et al., 2011).

Eatough and Smith (2008) argue that IPA sits on the social constructivist continuum, a continuum, as Danziger (1997) suggests, that incorporates light and dark versions of social constructivism. For Eatough and Smith (2008), IPA sits at the lighter end of social constructivism, which focuses more on social processes and the ongoing construction of meaning. However, Cromby and Nightingale's (1999) illustration of the dark version of Foucault's work on social constructivism, which attends to issues of power and subjectivity, is out of keeping with the core principles of IPA. Eatough and Smith (2008) endorse social constructivism to the extent that they accept that sociocultural and historical processes are central to how we experience and understand our lives. With this in mind, the analysis of the data in this research reflected a social constructivist stance in line with the constructivist claim that meanings are constructed by people engaged in the world (Crotty, 1998).

Smith et al. (2009) advocate that the prime reason for choosing IPA as a research approach should be because it is consistent with the research questions. It is, therefore, important in an IPA study to be able to rationalise the research questions in relation to IPA's focus on people's experiences, understandings, perceptions and views (ibid.).

Research question 1 (RQ1): What do teachers view as important in their teaching of reading?

RQ1 was based on the understanding that teachers draw on their beliefs and experiences to influence their classroom practice, and by providing collaborative opportunities in my research methods it is hoped that teachers' practical knowledge and understanding of the teaching of reading will become visible (Benner, 1994). Given that IPA is concerned with a detailed examination of making sense of experience, the emphasis of RQ1 was focused on how the participants constructed, reflected and to some extent challenged their understandings of the teaching of reading. In addition, RQ1 sought to realise IPA's desire to reveal aspects of people's experiences and understandings that may have previously been hidden (Smith et al., 2009). In exploring RQ1, it was hoped, from an IPA perspective, that aspects of classroom practice that are unseen could be revealed to share a greater understanding of teachers' experiences on the teaching of reading.

Research question (RQ2): How do teachers receive and respond to the influence of policy in their practice?

Whitty (2000) refers to teachers making judgements concerning effective professional practice, and that they should be recognised as autonomous agents whose knowledge and expertise is of importance. RQ2 sought to make sense of the teachers' individual practices and to value their major role in contributing to the understanding of teaching reading, not only within this research, but as professionals who have something to add to the academic discussion. RQ2, therefore, was consistent with IPA's commitment to exploring and interpreting the human experience as part of a process that values and respects the personal accounts of the research participants (Smith et al., 2009). RQ2 was interested in the experiences and sense-making of teachers concerning how they receive and respond to policy on the teaching of reading. It represented an attempt to reveal and share 'what the experience for [each participant] is like, and what sense [each participant] is making of what is happening to them' (Smith et al., 2009, p.3).

Research question 3 (RQ3): Are the understandings the teachers have fixed, or can they be shaped by interactions?

The IPA researcher, in developing the emergent themes, engages in a cyclic process in which they continuously re-evaluate their ideas as they interact with the research participants' transcripts (Smith et al., 2009; Willig, 2013). The IPA research participants, on the other hand, are required to recall, make judgements and form conclusions, in a dynamic process of reflection and re-evaluation as they make sense of their personal and social worlds (Smith et al., 2009). As such, IPA is concerned with cognition; how our thoughts and experiences shape and reshape our knowledge of the world: 'This cognition occurs within the informal, intuitive domain of reflective activity in the natural attitude. It is dynamic, multi-dimensional, affective, embodied, and intricately connected with our engagement with the world' (ibid., pp.191).

IPA's interest in cognition links to social constructivism, as there is a consensus that constructivism is concerned with empowering individuals to create their own understandings, and through social interactions they may exchange and build alternative ideas and perspectives (Richardson, 1997; Wilkinson, 2003). To reveal and comprehend the multiple understandings in this research, the teachers in this study willingly, as Peskin, Katz and Lazare (2009) suggest, interrogated their practice critically, both individually and collaboratively, as meanings emerged in the process of social interactions between people. In this research the intention was to engage teachers in reflective and collaborative thinking, beyond just story swapping, but to encourage a rigorous examination of their practice, enhancing and exchanging their understandings, both individually and collectively (Little, 1990). RQ3 sought to explore whether the teachers' understandings of reading were fixed or could be shaped through interactions. RQ3 aligns with social constructivist and IPA thinking, as it is directly concerned with the participants' sense-making. Consistent with IPA, RQ3 is interested in the research participants' engagement with the world, and how their engagements shape and reshape their understandings (Smith et al., 2009).

3.2.2.1 Considerations for the Choice of IPA

In searching for an appropriate approach for an interpretative inquiry that aligned with my constructivist principles and values, I considered two approaches: narrative inquiry and interpretative phenomenological analysis. Each of the two methodologies had aspects that would provide a framework for my research. After considering both, I detail in the sections below why I chose to use interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) over a narrative inquiry.

Narrative inquiry is a particular type of qualitative and interpretative approach that revolves around an interest in life experiences narrated by those who live in them (Clandinin and Rosiek, 2007). Undertaking a narrative inquiry would not, I feel, have gone far enough in revealing the teachers' understandings and experiences, as I wanted to encourage the participants to be analytic about their practice. Interestingly, as Csarniswska and Kidd (2011) note, in an interview situation participants often recount their sense-making as chronicles in a chronological and causal chain of events, which can lack clarity and purpose. In my research, the participants were given a task to complete at the same time that the interviews were taking place to encourage reflection. Although Lock, Epston and Maisel (2004) suggest that narrative can help people to discover ways of storying their situation, the task required more than a narrative. A narrative account would, as Benner (1994) suggests, simply be a skilful way to allow participants to describe their everyday concern and practical knowledge. However, this study was looking to reveal depth in their understanding and sought to generate a dialogue to raise interesting issues and allow different perspectives to emerge. The aim of the study was for a greater emphasis on not only the interactions between participants but also interactions with what they knew and believed. A story of their practice punctuated with meaningful events would not have been enough to meet the aims of the study (Csarniswska and Kidd, 2007). The use of IPA allowed for the teachers' stories to be told through an analysis of their practice rather than in chronological order indicative of narrative inquiry. I decided that an interpretative approach for this study would reveal much more than simply a narration of the teachers' practices. IPA would reveal

what happens underneath the everyday flow of the lived experience and provide an understanding of how teachers teach reading. As such, the research attempted to make sense of what the teachers do on a daily basis, at a micro level, by providing them with an opportunity to contemplate their practice. The participants were encouraged to step back from the continuously adapted and adjusted practice they took ownership of and to share their knowledge and experience through collaborative opportunities. The intention of a collaborative approach was for the participants to identify possibilities within their practice and, as indicated previously, to value the teacher's voice. My concerns about using a narrative inquiry were that potentially something could be overlooked and that the depth of understanding I was seeking to reveal would remain concealed. My attention was drawn towards IPA as an interpretative qualitative approach. IPA has its origins in understanding how people make sense of their life experiences. As Smith et al. (2009) suggest, IPA provides a way of discovering something about people's involvement and positioning towards the world and about how they make sense of it in context.

IPA, like narrative inquiry, includes the idea of sense-making, but IPA was more consistent with this study's theoretical underpinnings of the research questions in that the exploratory research questions sought to explore the teachers' understandings and go beyond just the capturing of their voices. Therefore, the flexibility offered by adopting an IPA approach aligned with the aims of the study to uncover, understand and value the perceptions and understandings that the teachers held. If the study had been more interested in the ways that the teachers' constructed or told their stories about their experiences of teaching reading, then narrative inquiry would have been applicable. However, in this study, the focus was firmly on the content of the teachers' stories and the sense-making behind them. As reflected in the research questions, this study was more exploratory than explanatory, aligning with the phenomenological and interpretative essence of IPA.

Smith et al. (2009) have produced extensive guidance on how to carry out phenomenological analysis and acknowledge that there are many different approaches underlying philosophies behind phenomenology. A commonality of research with phenomenological approaches is that

they have all tended to share a particular interest in thinking about what the experience of being a human is like, in all its various aspects, but especially in terms of the things which matter to us, and which constitute our lived world. (ibid., p.13)

Husserl (1927) refers to phenomenological inquiry as stepping back from everyday experience to observe and consider what is being overlooked in our daily consciousness. van Manen (1997) argues that, to be phenomenological, there is a need to disengage from the activity and attend to the *taken for granted* experience. There is a synergy here for me with the data collection methods I used, as the methods were all carefully selected to encourage the participants to take time from their busy lives and to focus on an aspect of their teaching. IPA and the methods chosen represented for me an attempt to reveal and speak up for what is merely glossed over or taken for granted (van Manen, 1997).

Smith, Flowers and Larkin's (2009) work had a positive influence on my thinking and provided a map to navigate through my first piece of qualitative, interpretative research. Van Manen's (2014) philosophical view that phenomenology allows the researcher to gain an insight into people's thinking accorded with the aims of my study and allowed the research to illuminate aspects of human experience that would otherwise not have been known (ibid.). The phenomenological work by Husserl (1927) is a valuable point in relation to my study in that he not only asks us to consider how we might identify necessary qualities of understanding by stepping out of our everyday experience, but rationalises that gaining an understanding of someone else's thinking might illuminate the experience for others too. Gaining an understanding and encouraging the participants to step back, to observe and to consider what could be overlooked in their practice was a crucial starting point for discussions (van Manen, 2014).

IPA studies are commonly small-scale situated investigations that are focused on particular individuals and circumstances; as such, 'IPA has an idiographic sensibility' (Smith et al., 2009, p.37). It is therefore not uncommon to situate IPA research within a case study framework. As Eatough and Smith (2008) suggest, case studies as part of IPA can illuminate and confirm the lived experiences of the particular individuals being studied. As Stake (1995) suggests, any research inquiry can be viewed as a case study, as it is conducted at a particular place and time with a particular group of individuals, and certainly, my research can be viewed from this perspective. Examining case study more closely, however, it was felt that case study and its defining features were not wholly compatible with the aims and intentions of this study.

Stake (1995) defines two broad approaches to conducting case study research, instrumental and intrinsic. Instrumental case studies, as detailed by Yin (1984), are focused on a particular issue or problem and are associated with hypothesis testing and the building of generalisations. My research sought to explore what teachers understand about the teaching of reading, and not to test a hypothesis about their understanding or to suggest that the findings could be generalised. In contrast, intrinsic case studies are interested specifically in an individual unit, for example, a child, a teacher, a group of teachers or a school (Stake, 1995, 2008). As such, intrinsic studies are focused on the case, and it is the case that dictates the direction of the study within a naturalistic process. As Thomas (2013) clarifies, intrinsic studies are case orientated and have no ulterior motivations or subordinate curiosities to block the direction of the exploration. Although this study freely encouraged the participants to explore their understandings in as non-directive a way as possible, the research did have a curiosity to understand what the teachers understood about the teaching of reading. The research data collection process, consequently, was designed in such a way as to refocus the participants' dialogues back to the discussion of teaching reading when necessary. To have adopted an intrinsic case study approach would have introduced the possibility of the research moving in directions not conducive to the aims and intentions of the study.

Finally, within case study research, cases are purposefully selected on the basis that they present a particular occurrence of something that is interesting or problematic (Simons, 2009; Stake, 1995; Thomas, 2013; Yin, 2003). The participating school in my research was selected for no reason other than that it was the first to respond to offered dates that facilitated the research time-frame. As I did not know the school or any of its teaching staff before I started the research, I had no awareness of any possible areas of interest or strengths and weakness. I simply wanted to gain an understanding of the participants' practice and reveal and value their understanding and viewpoints. The teachers involved in the research were not selected under any criteria, and only staff that volunteered to take part in the study participated.

Although a narrative inquiry would have offered a means by which the participants could voice their concerns and practical knowledge, I felt that IPA had the potential to go further by giving a group of primary school teachers a voice in the important debate of how children learn to read, and to provide an in-depth understanding of their experiences concerning the teaching of reading. I have also detailed why case study was not considered to be a relevant component in this IPA study. This study is representative of a small-scale study whose participants were selected purely on the basis that they were primary school teachers who taught reading.

3.2.3 Valuing the Research Participants and Their Voices

Sutherland and Katz (2005) contend that concept mapping (detailed later in the chapter) is a transformative process for participants involved in the research, a notion that I explored during the design of my study. Aronowitz and Giroux's (1986) work on transformative intellectuals aligned with what this research ultimately wished to reveal: the recognition of teachers' individual and collective understandings, with the research having a meaning for the participants involved. Thus, it was hoped that through professional discourse and collaborative participation, the teachers in this study would be involved in a transformational process (detailed in the paragraph below) that not only had the

potential to transform their practice but to transform the lives of others, whether colleagues or the students in their classrooms (Mezirow, 2000).

As a concept within this study, transformational knowing links to the constructivist principles that underpin this research, namely that teachers have the potential to explore and modify their professional thinking and intellectual capabilities through professional discourse. Aronowitz and Giroux (1986) note that teachers are capable through their involvement, not just in this study but in their practice too, of examining and potentially changing their conceptions of their teaching practice. The approach taken in this research was to value and critically examine the contributions of the participants, not as individuals being researched, but as a partner with the researcher to come to an understanding of what we know. Giroux's (2010) idea of 'transformative intellectuals' views teachers as intellectuals taking active responsibility for raising questions about how and what they teach rather than ignoring the intelligence and beliefs they have. I adopted Giroux's definition of transformative intellectuals to explain my use of the word 'value' in the context of this study, as I recognise the participants as reflective practitioners who share their experience and intelligence to engage in a developing discourse critically.

The research approach certainly needed to be exploratory and not predetermined in its objectives. However, there was a requirement that the data collection process stimulate and engage the participants in order to enable professional social interactions and an exchange of ideas. Just as the participants' voices were important, so too was the environment in which data was collected. As suggested by Khattri and Miles (1994), the choice of the school premises for data collection creates the conditions for understanding and thought seamlessly linking the environment with the research. Similarly, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) note that the place of data collection should be carefully considered, and the collection should take place in a natural setting to help participants make sense of and interpret the meanings of the discussions and contributions to the research.

It is not unusual for teachers' views to be represented in scholarly research (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1992). What is less common, and something I wanted to include in this research, was to not only capture their views but to make the linkage Whitty (2000) refers to between teachers' expert knowledge and having ownership of the decisions in relation to effective practice (Morgan, 2007). In accordance with IPA, this study hoped to illuminate the voice and experiences of the teachers involved. Through discourse, there was an opportunity to share the teachers' active voice to develop a language of critique with a language of possibility. The opportunity to share their voice recognised them as transformative intellectuals able to raise questions about what they teach, how they teach and the larger goals that they are striving for in their teaching.

3.2.4 Research Methods

Finding ways of understanding and capturing accurately what my research participants understood about the teaching of reading, and how they constructed these ideas, caused me some anxiety. The methods I employed for this study needed to reveal the teachers' understandings, but the methods involved also had to value their contributions. Bateson (1972) refers to how knowledge needs to be on the premise of obtaining the truth from the participants and valuing the participants' constructs. The participants needed to be at the centre of the research, actively constructing the data and being passionate participants sharing what they understand (Lincoln, Lynham and Guba, 2011). The participants sharing understandings and perspectives on the teaching of reading based on their interactions, experience and surroundings was fundamental to this research (Guba and Lincoln, 1981). As advocated by Guba (1990), I worked closely with the participants so that the findings of the research were a creation of the interactions between us. It was hoped that, as Sutherland and Katz (2005) suggest, working closely with research participants would allow for the emergence of co-constructed knowledge and a better representation of the multiple interests and perspectives involved.

Being mindful of representing multiple interests and perspectives, as stated previously the theory underpinning the framework for this qualitative study is social constructivism, it followed then that in taking a social constructivist approach I sought to describe and/or explain how people have come by their conceptual positioning (Wienberg, 2009). In recognising that the participants' understandings were not fixed and that they could be challenged through discussion and reflection, I would raise people's consciousness (Hacking, 1999). From the outset, the aim was to uncover and encourage teachers to challenge the constructions they have (Guba, 1995) on the teaching of reading. Within the design of a social constructivist study, it is necessary to use research strategies to elicit understanding, and as Ponterotto (2005) argues, for hidden meanings to be brought to the surface. Schwandt (1998) suggests that data collection methods need to encourage deep reflection, and through an interaction between the participant and the researcher the understandings held by participants may be challenged. With this in mind, the methods chosen for data collection and the approach taken for analysis necessarily needed to be cohesive with the social constructivist design of the study and uncover the understandings and perceptions held by teachers on the teaching of reading. The methods selected for this study were concept mapping and non-directive interviews, both of which are discussed below. To add clarity to this discussion, a flowchart diagram is shown in Figure 3-1 indicating how the data collection methods sit within the framework of the research design and how they link to the research questions and data analysis.

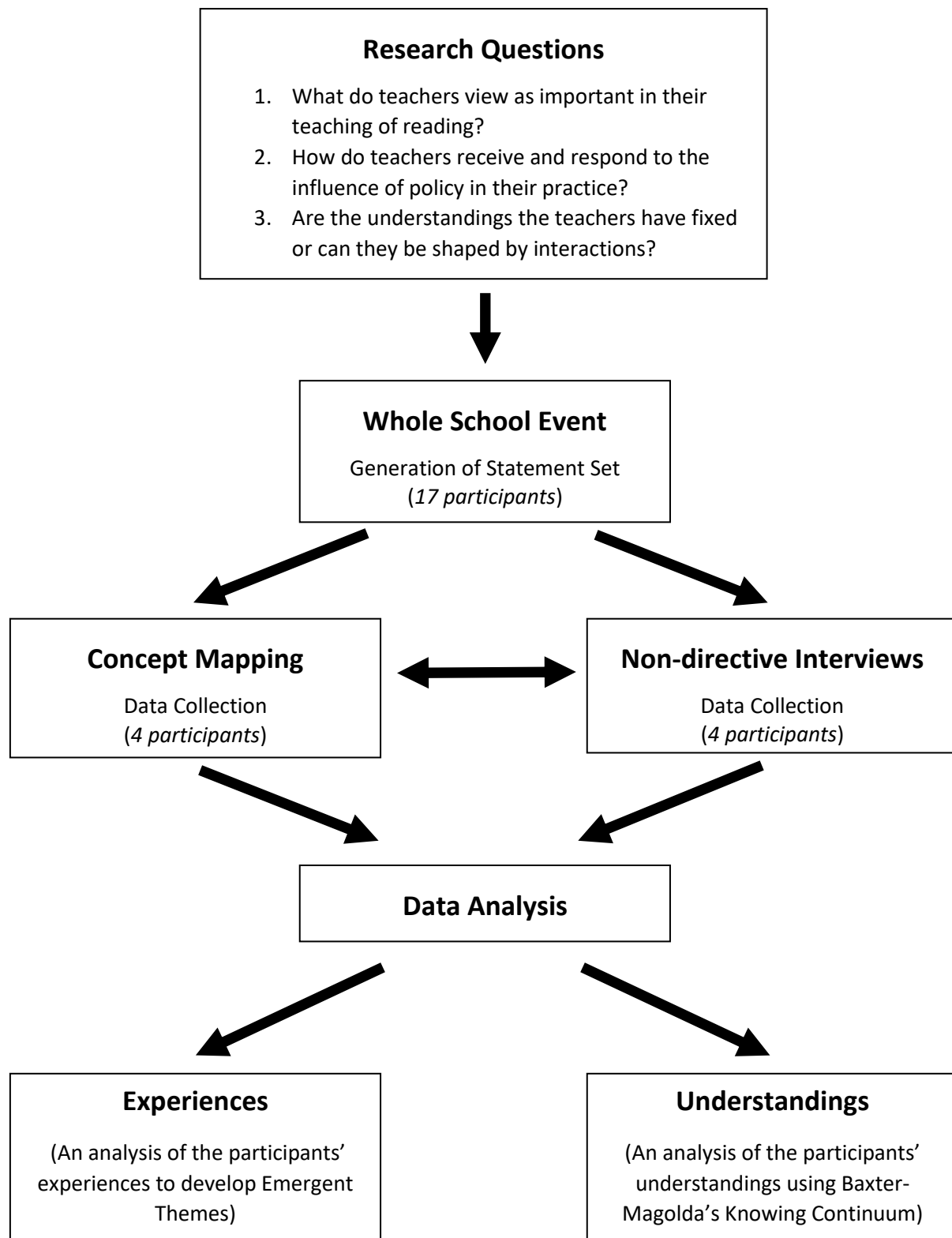


Figure 3-1 Flow diagram of data collection methods and analysis

3.2.4.1 Concept Mapping

In this section on concept mapping, I discuss what characterises concept mapping and why concept maps were selected for this research. I then explain how concept maps were used to reveal the participants' deeper understandings and perceptions on the teaching of reading. Also discussed is how concept maps were used alongside non-directive interviews.

McLinden and Trochim (2017) state that qualitative concept mapping methods are grounded in the social constructivist perspective with opportunities for the participants to construct and reconstruct their knowledge through discussion, challenge and reflection (Molinari, 2017). Concept mapping is, as Kane and Trochim (2007) state, a generic term that describes any process for representing ideas in pictures and maps. The history of concept mapping has two main origins, psychological and sociological (Sutherland and Katz, 2005). The psychological approach was influenced by Ausbel's (1968) cognitive theory, and the structure for concept mapping using this approach emphasises humans' systematic acquisition, storage access and utilisation of knowledge (Golledge, 1986). The sociological origin of this idea, which was influential in this research, uses concept mapping as a process for understanding and making connections to the participants' knowledge and understanding. Concept mapping in this sociological sense is about the acquisition of knowledge through interactive processes between the individuals and the environment. It involves an interactive and collaborative process in which the participants' knowledge and understandings are constructed socially, locally and experientially (Lincoln and Guba, 2011).

Concept mapping was chosen to ensure that the data collection methods were representative of the participants' voices. Concept mapping provided data that was sensitive to the participants' needs and provided a stimulus for participation (Creswell, 2013). The use of concept mapping as a method aimed to uncover the participants' understanding of the teaching of reading. The concept maps, it was hoped, would help the individual participants to think more effectively and keep a focus on the teaching of reading while the maps were constructed. Sutherland and Katz (2005) suggest that

the construction of concept maps helps to promote interaction and an exchange of ideas, which create the conditions for how ideas link together (Kane and Trochim, 2007). In using concept maps, I hoped to provide the mechanism by which the teachers could engage in an interactive process and have the opportunity to reflect on the constructs of their practice (Sutherland and Katz, 2005).

Concept maps were used in this study as a stimulus for the participants' thinking. I chose to use aspects of concept mapping for the data collection – for example, the whole school event for collaborative brainstorming to generate an agreed statement set (Figure 3-1) and unstructured sorting of statements into concept maps (Trochim, 1989; Linton, 2006). The use of concept mapping linked directly with social constructivism in that the participants used the concept maps to make visible their knowledge and understandings, and through social interactions the participants built and exchanged alternative ideas and perspectives (Kane and Trochim, 2007; Sutherland and Katz, 2005). Being mindful that the fundamental principle of concept mapping is that knowledge and understandings are representative of all participants' perspectives, the statement set collected was representative of the knowledge and understanding constructed collaboratively (Figure 3-1). Concept mapping had the capacity to encourage participants to think together through an interactive process with colleagues to develop broader, common and shared understandings (Huberman, 1990). The knowledge constructed was the interactive link between the participants, and as defined by Sutherland and Katz (2005), represented the bringing together of diverse views and values of multiple stakeholders in a clear and systematic way. The constructs formed were then used to build individual concept maps in which each participant began to share their personal vision and revealed their thinking and response to the co-constructed knowledge they were a part of (Rosas and Kane, 2012). Novak and Gowin (1984) state that, in line with social constructivist principles, the participants often recognise new meanings and wrestle with ideas they did not consciously hold before.

Kane and Trochim's (2007) original design for concept mapping includes both qualitative and quantitative methods. However, my research adopted a purely qualitative perspective. Therefore,

there are two main reasons for adapting the original version of concept mapping to employ some of the qualitative aspects. First, Kane and Trochim's quantitative data collection methods use a sophisticated computer program designed to look for trends and patterns across large numbers of participants. My research was significantly smaller, with its principal aim being to explore teachers' understandings and perceptions, and not to generate a list of knowledge which could be analysed digitally. In this research the use of collaborative understandings (the statement set) was a starting place for teachers to construct their understandings and to enrich and sharpen their thinking. Therefore, my second reason for adopting Kane and Trochim's model was to focus on the participants' personal understandings, where each individual would be valued in the research. This was achieved through discussion with each teacher as they critically evaluated their practice.

A challenge was to ensure that the use of concept mapping was consistent with my second data collection method of non-directive interviews. The teachers, in the non-directive interviews, used the concept maps as a stimulus for discussion and a task to be completed. First, the participants reflected on their understandings using the statement set. Second, the participants used the statement set to construct concept maps. During the construction of the concept maps the teachers revealed their understandings through discussion and on some occasions critically examined the beliefs they held. The use of the non-directive interviews was crucial for capturing the discussion around the task, as the construction of the concept maps appeared to be a mechanism for developmental change or a transformative process (Sutherland and Katz, 2005). The combination of the concept mapping method and the use of non-directive interviews provided the fluidity I was looking for in my data collection.

3.2.4.2 Non-directive Interviews

In this section on non-directive interviews, I discuss what characterises a non-directive interview and why non-direct interviews were selected for this research. I discuss how non-directive interviews

were used and how they were a particularly valuable method for revealing deeper understandings and perceptions on the teaching of reading.

The creation of non-directive interviews is often attributed to the work of Freud; his work with psychiatric patients led him to consider conditions and circumstances that were more conducive to encouraging the patient to talk openly (Cohen et al., 2011). The non-directive interview, in the sense of a research method much wider than the psychological field, is still recognisable as having Freudian principles and is based on the provision of a stimulus which encourages the participant to talk (in this study, about the statement sets). Rogers (1969) developed the non-directive interview and suggested that the technique could stimulate a depth of understanding from the participant not typically revealed in other interview approaches. Newby (2010) considers that by giving the participant the dominant role, non-directive interviews have been shown to be a particularly valuable technique, as they reveal deeper attitudes and perceptions and reduce the possibility of interviewer bias (Kitwood, 2006). Newby (2010) also suggests that participants in non-directive interviews are more likely to perceive themselves as the expert when presented with the opportunity to discuss their practice. However, the opportunity to discuss their practice does not suggest that the non-directive interview is without structure. In non-directive interviews, the researcher provides the stimulus and task and refocuses the discussion area. Any interruption to the participant's discussion must be carefully considered, as too much refocusing may restrict the participant's natural sequence of discourse. The researcher's role in the non-directive interview is non-judgemental. Instead, the role is to listen and value the contributions instigated and shared by the participant. As the participant instigates and guides the discourse of the interview, the researcher gains a sense of the participant's attitudes and feelings. Gray (2004) advises that the interviewer's role is purely to check on unclear points and ensure that meaning is accurate. The researcher will have in mind the research focus, but for the duration of the interview, the participant is encouraged to talk freely about the subject. In this sense, the researcher strives to allow the participants to set the terms and parameters of the

interview discussion. The non-directive interview is characterised by creating a set of conditions that encourage the participant to reflect on the stimulus provided, to inspire their self-awareness and to improve their skills through self-analysis.

The choice of non-directive interviews was arrived at rather than selected for this research. The intention was to use concept mapping as a method, but I was not certain that the data collection source would yield appropriate data. A pilot study was conducted (Section 1.3.1). The pilot project had a significant impact on the final choice of data collection methods. During the pilot, it became noticeable that the participants naturally provided commentary to the stimulus statement set, and they began to reveal deeper understandings and perceptions through discourse. The participants responded to the task in a way which had not been anticipated. The participants gave a natural commentary on their decisions. The stimulus encouraged the teachers to reflect on their thinking, conflicts, decisions and justifications for their responses. To overlook and not record the shared understandings and multiple perspectives on the teaching of reading, in the form of non-directive interviews in the final research, would have resulted in much poorer data for analysis.

The non-directive interviews were used in the second phase of the data collection alongside the construction of concept maps. Each participant was presented with a statement set as a stimulus. The actual interview guidance given to each participant was minimal, as it was hoped that the participant being interviewed, rather than the researcher, would guide the course of the discourse. The actual interview focused on the subjective experiences and unanticipated responses of the participants. Each participant was able to reflect on personal experiences and consider a flow of thoughts and meanings around the stimulus (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). As part of the interview, I accepted what the participant shared and valued their contributions, always mindful that I did not want to provoke the participant's natural defence around their understandings, which may have altered the information shared (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Once the interviews commenced, outside of the stimulus and task, the course and content of the interview were not known. However, the non-

directive interviews provided an opportunity for the participants to share and make sense of their experiences and talk freely on the teaching of reading. The strength of non-directive interviews and the cohesiveness of the technique with concept mapping is that the teachers engage with the interactive process of constructing a map while making sense of their practice on the teaching of reading. The recordings of the non-directive interviews captured the reflections made by the participants. The principles behind non-directive interviews aligned with the IPA approach of seeking an in-depth understanding of the participant's understanding and experience, in that the interview technique promotes an openness from the participant (Smith and Osbourn, 2008).

3.3 Data Collection

In this section, I consider each aspect of the data collection process. I have presented and summarised the research questions and data collection methods in a table (Figure 3-2) by way of reminding readers of how the data collection methods linked to the questions and research purpose (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). The table has the additional information of the data collection time-frame from the pilot study to data collection.

I begin with a section on the pilot research and discuss how the pilot shaped the final data collection process. I then present and share how the school and participants were selected to be involved in the research. Finally, I explore and discuss phase one and phase two of the data collection process. The research questions again are as follows:

1. What do teachers view as important in their teaching of reading?
2. How do teachers receive and respond to the influence of policy in their practice?
3. Are the understandings the teachers have fixed or can they be shaped by interactions?

Research Questions	Participant Questions	Research Purpose	Data Collection Method	Data Analysis	Timeline
					April 2015 – Pilot research conducted with two groups of participants. Group one to provide a statement set. The second group, to use the statement set to construct concept maps.
					March 2016- Email to Headteacher with details of research and possible date for first meeting Meeting with research school to agree dates, requirements and final arrangements for the whole school event.
What do teachers view as important in their teaching of reading?	What do you believe is important for children to become accomplished readers?	Based on the understanding that teachers draw on their own beliefs and experience to influence their classroom practice – through collaborative opportunities the teachers make visible their practical knowledge.	Whole school event to generate an agreed statement set (17 participants)	Preparation of the agreed statement set ready for use in the second stage of the research. To analyse the statement set as the collaborative knowledge of the research group.	June 2016- Whole school event held at the school involved with the research
What do teachers view as important in their teaching of reading?	How important are the statements, from the	Seeks to make sense of their individual practice and to value their major	1) Interpretable maps (4 participants)	Comparison of interpretable maps. Looking for themes, ideas	July 2016- 1:1 meetings with participants to complete

How do teachers receive and respond to the influence of policy in their practice?	agreed set, in your daily teaching of reading?	role in contributing to the understanding of teaching reading. To consider their experience, reflect and to some extent challenge their own practice and perceptions.		and how they link these. Looking for variables and looking for a consensus and consistency in what each participant is sharing and for consistency and consensus between the participants taking part in the research.	interpretable maps and conduct non-directive interviews.
Research Questions	Participant Questions	Research Purpose	Data Collection Method	Data Analysis	Timeline
	Is there any conflict/comparison with your own personal view and approach to the teaching of reading with school and government policy?	Seeks to make sense of their individual practice and to value their major role in contributing to the understanding of teaching reading. To consider their experience, reflect and to some extent challenge their own practice and perceptions.	2) Non-directive Interviews (4 participants)	Transcripts of digital recordings and identification of key themes and ideas in relation to the teachers' understanding of teaching reading. Baxter-Magolda (1996) – social constructivist lens.	August 2016- Transcripts of non-directive interviews were sent to participants for clarification and agreement.
Are the understandings the teachers have fixed or can they be shaped by interactions?		Social constructivism is concerned with empowering individuals to create their own understanding. Through social interactions they may build alternative ideas and perspectives.	Interpretable maps/non-directive interviews as above	Baxter-Magolda's Continuum (1996) for use in the analysis of teachers' understanding of teaching reading – are teachers' understandings fixed or can they be shaped by interactions?	November 2017–April 2018

Figure 3-2 A table of the research process

3.3.1 Pilot Research

I conducted a pilot study to check the data collection methods to ensure that I captured the individual and shared understandings on the teaching of reading. Ely et al. (1991) suggest that a pilot can give insight on data collection methods and I hoped to better understand the levels of understanding likely to be revealed. I had considered several methods to employ for my research. The use of concept mapping was always a contender as its principles aligned with my own constructivist values (Kane and Trochim, 2007). To use the data collected for my research successfully, I needed to make absolutely sure that the methods were going to answer the research questions. A pilot would allow me to focus on this particular area (Denzin and Lincoln, 1997). I also needed to understand the potential difficulties of using the methods if only on an organisational level (ibid.).

In the pilot, I had enlisted two groups of people, one group to provide the data set and the second group to use the data to construct the maps. The first group consisted of past colleagues drawn from a range of professions within education: university lecturers, LEA literacy consultants, school literacy coordinators and experienced (in terms of years) primary teachers. The second group consisted of teaching staff from a primary school where I had taught a few years ago. The two groups used in the pilot were not known to each other, and to my knowledge had no relation to each other in any other capacity. It is worth noting here that none of the participants in the pilot study went on to be involved in the final research. The first group generated the data (the agreed statement set). The second group used the data (generated by group one) to construct the concept maps. What became glaringly obvious during the construction of the concept maps was that the participants were approaching the task cold and that there was no ownership for them with the agreed statement set. They understood the statements and recognised them for their value within the teaching of reading, but they had not had the opportunity to work collaboratively to develop a shared knowledge. The agreed statement set was not a representation of their understandings but that of the first group. This was formative for my thinking with the framing of the data collection process for the actual research, especially as I wanted the research to empower teachers as equal contributors and

recognise them as democratic professionals (Whitty, 2006). By removing participants from the first phase of the research, I had gone against my principles and the intentions of the study. The second group had been given an agreed statement set in which they had not contributed to the knowledge and understandings, and on reflection it was seen that the approach was more quantitative using pre-generated data to organise. It became just a task to be completed and not, as I had hoped, with the participants engaging with the pre-generated data. I recognised that this needed to be addressed in the actual data collection.

It seems an obvious error to use, in the pilot research, a statement set that represented the knowledge and understandings of an entirely different group. I had originally considered that the two groups could be different, based on Kane and Trochim's (2007) approach to concept mapping, where a focus group could generate a statement set, and then a second much wider sample group could create maps using the statements pre-generated. The use of Kane and Trochim's original concept mapping model was increasingly evolutionary with the methods being adapted to meet the aims and intentions of this study (Ely et al., 1991).

A significant change to Kane and Trochim's (2007) original concept mapping approach was the inclusion of non-directive interviews. In Kane and Trochim's model, no recordings or interviews take place while the concept maps are being constructed. However, as I had observed in the pilot, the participants creating the maps gave a natural commentary on their decisions and anecdotes about their everyday experiences (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). While scribbling down this valuable data, I realised that this stage of the research had to be recorded, as their voice and justification for their decisions provided arguably a much richer data set. It was a way of interpreting their understanding of teaching reading by listening to their voices (Gluck and Patai, 1991). The recording of the session had to be embedded in the design of the research, as there was an interaction between myself and the participants which added depth to the data (Bell, 2009; Chase, 2010).

The pilot study had a significant influence on the final design of the data collection methods. There was a necessity for the participants involved in the construction of the concept maps to also be

involved with the first phase of the data collection, by way of generating the statement set. It was also going to be crucial to include non-directive interviews, as the participants in the pilot study had used the data to examine their practice critically. I recognised that the combination of structuring interpretable maps and non-directive interviews gave the participants a mechanism for developmental change. The pilot also proved to be effective for timings and how to organise and manage vast quantities of 'Post-it' notes (Denzin, 1997). It is worth noting here that without the inclusion of a pilot, the research would have yielded different outcomes for my research.

3.3.2 Selection of School and Participants

Working closely with the teachers, the aim of the research was not to objectify the participants but to value their understandings. Central to this research was the importance placed on the participants' voice, and not a judgement of their teaching practice. Therefore, the teachers' classroom practice was not observed. Arguably, lesson observations are subjective, and would have only provided a snapshot of the teachers' practice, and this research sought to delve deeper to reveal their understandings and perceptions on the teaching of reading. As discussed in previous sections, the approach and methods chosen were therefore necessarily attuned to revealing local understandings and perspectives (Gubrium, 1993; Holstein, 1993). The methods chosen for data collection hoped to value and reveal the depth and detail of the participants' understandings and perceptions of teaching reading. With the aim and intentions of the research firmly embedded in constructivist principles, the intention was always to value the construction process and reflexive thinking that was stimulated by the statement set and concept mapping task (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). The knowledge obtained and constructed in this research was placed in a local setting where their multiple understandings of teaching reading could be developed locally through a collaboratively and socially constructed process (Guba and Lincoln, 1995; Kane and Trochim, 2007), with the opportunity to reflect on their individual practice during the non-directive interviews.

It would have been unmanageable, given the time-frame of the study period and resources available to me, to seek the understandings of teachers beyond one school (Cohen et al., 2011). Moreover, it is not uncommon for a piece of qualitative research to focus on a relatively small sample (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). I was aware that the nature of a small-scale study had the potential to clarify, rather than obscure, the personal nature of the research (Thomas, 2011). With this in mind, the sample size and the methods chosen demonstrated the collaborative and participatory voice of the participants (Kane and Trochim, 2007). The participants were in a position to express and discuss their personal views without me distancing myself too far from the content of the research or indeed influencing the participants' thinking. The appropriateness and suitability of the participants involved was strengthened by them all being practising primary teachers and therefore all teachers of reading (Cohen et al., 2011). No other sample criterion was needed or adopted (Creswell, 2013).

3.3.3 Appleberry Primary School

The selection of the school, as discussed in the section above, was not based on any predetermined criteria relating to the school's performance or approach to teaching reading. However, the school chosen was given careful consideration, as I wanted the school and staff to be previously unknown to me, as I recognised that any existing professional relationships could influence participants' thinking and potentially alter responses. I therefore took steps to avoid including prior colleagues as participants in the research. As the study was interested in representing teachers' professional expertise and understandings, the participants needed to feel free to explore their thinking and not be inhibited by potential influences drawn from previous professional working relationships. I recognised, however, that the interactions between the staff at the school and myself during the data collection period could potentially form new professional relationships (Coffey, 1999).

I began the selection of a school by browsing school websites in areas I had not practised as a teacher or held a leadership post. I browsed school websites to look for details of the headteacher and staff listings to see if there were any previous working relationships with the personnel listed. I

compiled a list of five schools to approach, and several schools responded positively to an initial email (Appendix 3). I visited each school in turn and discussed my research ideas with the headteachers. Appleberry Primary School indicated that they were willing to participate in the research. The time-frame for the research and the school's capacity to include my research was a contributing factor (Cohen et al., 2011) for my final selection of Appleberry Primary School. The selection of Appleberry Primary School was also influenced by the headteacher, David, through his willingness to be involved in the research. The relationship he had with his staff also influenced me, as he valued the opinions of his team members. During our initial meeting, he invited several members of staff to be involved in the initial discussions about the research. David valued the teachers' thoughts and ideas on how my research could be accommodated into a busy school. Interestingly, David and the small group of staff also discussed the potential impact my research could have on their teaching staff, something that was only tentative in my research design at the time. The interactions and shared experiences needed to collect the data were going to be dependent on and guided by the relationships that would be built and established over time (Coffey, 1999). David and his staff had welcomed the opportunity to be involved and had both the capacity and commitment to accommodate my research (Clandinin and Rosiek, 2007).

It was necessary from the beginning to work collaboratively with David. I prepared a briefing sheet for David so that he had an outline of the school's involvement in my research (Appendix 4). I recognised and believed that it was important to develop a positive relationship with the school. As Coffey (1999) suggests, the interaction and quality of data relies on the formation of such relationships. The research was going to be incorporated into the school's already busy schedule, and some flexibility was going to be required on my part. David's inclusive approach to exploring opportunities for his staff gave rise to all his teachers being involved at the whole school event, and he agreed that we should leave it to the individual teachers to decide if they wanted to proceed to the second phase. As Ely (1991) suggests, it could have been quite easy for the research to lose momentum in the school. The attention to detail from David proved to be invaluable as the data

collection process progressed. He looked into ways to accommodate the second phase of the data collection to be completed during the school day in order to avoid the possibility of staff being deterred from taking part in the second stage of the research due to considerations of time required. To accommodate the second phase of the research, David looked at options for the use of teachers' PPA (Planning, Preparation and Assessment) time and PE (Physical Education) slots, when sports coaching staff are responsible for the children's education. I was grateful for how my research was accommodated, as academic research is not always the highest priority for a busy school. Without David's careful consideration of the logistics of my research on the school, the study could have been compromised (Ely, 1991). A timetable was drawn up, and the whole school event was scheduled. As David was in agreement with my desire to have all of the teaching staff present and involved at the first stage of the data collection, the event took place during a school staff meeting dedicated to the research. The details of the staff from Appleberry Primary School who attended the whole school event are presented in Figure 3-3 below.

Whole School Event		
Groups Represented at the Whole School Event	Number of Teachers	Brief Details on attendees at the Whole School Event
Early Years	2	Flo – Early years lead Emily – class teacher
Year 1	2	NQT and assistant headteacher
Year 2	2	Ruby Key Stage One leader & NQT
Year 3	2	Classroom teacher (Time teaching 6 years) Classroom teacher (Time teaching 10 years)
Year 4	2	Deputy headteacher (Time teaching 7 years) & Classroom teacher (Time teaching 2 years)
Year 5	2	Nancy (Time teaching 2 years) Classroom teacher (Time teaching 4 years)
Year 6	3	Classroom teacher (Time teaching 4 years) Classroom teacher (Time teaching 4 years) Intervention teacher (Time teaching 12 years)
Senior Leadership	2	David – Headteacher (Time teaching 9 years) Special Educational Needs teacher (Time teaching 15 years)

Figure 3-3 Table of teaching staff present at the whole school event

3.3.4 Gathering the Data

As detailed in Figure 3-1, the data were collected in two phases. The first phase, the whole school event, was where all the teachers worked collaboratively developing a shared school knowledge of teaching reading. The data was recorded as an agreed statement set. The second phase involved individual teachers participating in non-directive interviews and the construction of concept maps. The agreed statement set was used as a stimulus for discussion and to construct the concept maps.

3.3.4.1 Whole School Event – Phase 1

The purpose of the whole school event was to establish a shared school knowledge on the teaching of reading. The whole school event was framed around the first of my research questions: *What do teachers view as important in their teaching of reading?* The event was deliberately informal, and the setting for the event needed to be attuned to naturally occurring talk and social interactions (Atkinson and Drew, 1979; Maynard, 2003). I wanted the participants to enjoy the experience, and I hoped to

build up trust with them through my interactions with individuals (Coffey, 1999). The teachers attending the whole school event are detailed above in Figure 3-3. I introduced myself and the research to the staff, and I used a PowerPoint to support my introduction (Appendix 5).

Through my informal conversations with the participants and the conversations they had with each other, multiple understandings were shared on the teaching of reading. These understandings were reflexively interwoven with the participants' social interactions (Sacks, 1992). A tacit knowledge became visible (Hargreaves, 1996) which ultimately appeared on the statements generated. The informal approach proved to be successful as the teachers were engaged, and they were enthusiastic about the task set. It appeared that an advantage of the informal approach was that it helped to create an openness and trust between the participants, as they discussed and clarified their thoughts (Knipe et al., 2007). Multiple understandings of teaching reading were expressed and discussed, and these evidenced a complexity of how the teachers' practice had been shaped by many different influences (Holly, 1989).

My involvement here was an important step in the research. Trochim and Kane (2007) suggest that involvement is more than passively waiting for participants to share ideas, and I thought I would be required to keep discussions on track to ensure the smooth flow of ideas. Interestingly, this was not the case, as the teachers responded to the task as an opportunity to not only construct a shared knowledge but also to exchange and construct alternative ideas and perspectives regarding their practice. A guideline of the activity and procedures followed during this event can be found in Appendix 6. At the end of the whole school event, the data was collated, and an agreed statement set was created (Appendix 7).

3.3.4.2 Interviews and Concept Maps – Phase 2

As previously explained in the section on data collection methods, the reasoning that led to organising the non-directive interviews and the construction of the interpretable maps to run simultaneously was as a direct result of an oversight in the pilot research. Newby (2010) suggests that giving the participants the position of the 'expert' in non-directive interviews allows deeper perceptions and

attitudes to be revealed and reduces the possibility for interview bias. Working in conjunction with the non-directive interviews, the concept maps, constructed using the agreed statement set (Appendix 7) from the whole school event, provided a rich stimulus for the teachers to engage with. As I had discovered in the pilot study, the commentary that accompanied the construction of the concept maps was a valuable source of data. Four participants chose to participate in phase two of the data collection, a quarter of the teaching staff at the school (Figure 3-3). Although the participants were given complete autonomy over how the statements were grouped, to avoid the creation of a miscellaneous concept map, the participants were asked to avoid placing statements they were unsure about in one group. The teachers were given examples on how the concept maps could be organised. For example, the creation of one concept map would have provided very little information on how the teachers were making links between the statements and resulted in simply recreating the statement set. I have detailed in Appendix 6 a description of the guidance given to the participants for structuring the concept maps.

3.4 Data Analysis

In this section, I discuss my research approach to data analysis. As previously illustrated in Figure 3-1, the analysis of data was consistent with the IPA approach. Initially, emergent themes were developed from the participants' transcripts. I then used Baxter-Magolda's theoretical lens of contextual knowing to analyse the data further. In this section, I outline the approach taken to analyse the emergent themes in the participants' transcripts and how I used themes taken from Baxter-Magolda's continuum to analyse the data through a social constructivist lens.

Uncovering an understanding and perspective of teachers' understandings of the teaching of reading was never going to be accomplished easily. Therefore, flexibility in the analysis was necessary to draw out the teachers' understandings in ways that reflected and captured the teachers' existing and developing perspectives (Smith et al., 2009). The flexible approach to analysis allowed the understandings and perspectives to emerge from the completed open-ended tasks (the concept maps

and non-directive interviews). The choice of methods for the data collection were consciously selected with the intention of revealing teachers' understandings and perceptions of the teaching of reading. In addition, as previously explained, the methods sought to create the cognitive conditions to challenge and persuade the participants to reflect, reconsider and possibly adjust their conceptual understandings. The starting point for my analysis was to look for emergent themes. I adhered to van Manen's (1997) holistic approach, which involved familiarising myself with the entire transcript and materials (concept maps). I perused the concept maps and written transcripts alongside each other many times over. For each participant, I repeatedly listened to the audio recordings while reviewing their concept maps. To sharpen my analysis, I created a table to place exploratory comments alongside each participant's transcript. A further column in the table prompted me to consider themes emerging in the participant's transcript. I have included in the appendices sample analysis pages as an example of how I analysed Ruby's transcript for emergent themes (Appendix 8). The continual listening to recordings helped to give context to the concept maps, at times revealing the uncertainties and confidences they seemed to have. I repeated this process for each participant. In the write-up of my findings, I select one of the many themes emerging in each of the participants' transcripts and intersperse it with a commentary between the extracts to provide context for the reader. The comments included in Chapter 4 are excerpts from the entire interview and some context may have been lost.

In the next stage of analysis, I used themes taken from Baxter-Magolda's continuum: *absolute*, *transitional*, *independent* and *contextual* knowing. Baxter-Magolda (2004) argues that the continuum provides a more accurate portrayal of the participants' understandings. To analyse the participants' transcripts through a social constructivist lens, I constructed a table based on Baxter-Magolda's (1996) social constructivist continuum of knowledge construction (Figure 3-3). I used the table as a reference point for analysis of the transcripts. In my analysis of the data, I looked for comments from the participant's transcript that typified the different positions on the continuum and grouped them under the four headings. Using Baxter-Magolda's criteria for analysis, I was able to stay

true to representing the teachers' voice but was also able to critically analyse the data to construct an informed perspective on how the teachers construct their understandings of teaching reading (1996). Difficulties were presented here, as Baxter-Magolda's continuum has four hierarchical domains or themes of knowing, ranging from 'Absolute' to 'Contextual'. Each transcript had aspects of each of the phases of knowing, as illustrated in a section taken from Nancy's (Appendix 9). In the write-up of this section, I used the analytic themes of absolute, transitional, independent and contextual knowing. As each of the participants' transcripts featured some or all of the contextual knowing themes, the extracts chosen were selected as being illustrative of the type of knowing.

For clarity, I have created a table to illustrate the phases of Baxter-Magolda's (2004) continuum of knowing (Figure 3-4) and summarised below the types of knowing. The absolute position suggests that the participants have an uncritical acceptance of expert knowledge, while the transitional knowing participant is beginning to adopt a more critical perspective in relation to their understanding. Independent knowing can be characterised by the level of confidence displayed by the participant and how they challenge assumptions. Contextual knowing on the continuum can be viewed as the autonomous agent thinking through problems and integrating and applying knowledge in context. I revisit the criteria on the continuum in Chapter 5.

Absolute Knowing	Transitional Knowing	Independent Knowing	Contextual Knowing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Works within their comfort zone. • Understands formal learning. • Uses expert knowledge. • Knows knowledge is certain and comes from authorities. • Reproduces knowledge. • Focuses on acquisition and achievement of knowledge. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begins to adopt a more critical perspective. • Beginning to form own understandings. • Beginning to understand that authority can be unreliable. • Acceptance that some knowledge is uncertain. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stronger confidence emerges. • Able to challenge assumptions. • Knowledge is mostly viewed as uncertain. • A confidence to think for oneself and creating individualised truths. • Establishing and understanding subjective points of view. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge is uncertain. • Identifying criteria with which to make choices. • One decides what to believe by evaluating evidence. • Thinking through problems. • Integrating knowledge. • Applying knowledge in context. • A central role in constructing knowledge.

Figure 3-4 Baxter-Magolda's (2004) continuum of knowing

3.5 Validity

Given its delimitations and method, this research could only ever represent a validity based on the participants involved with the study (Guba and Lincoln, 1995). It was never intended to claim any validity external from this research (Ely, 1991). The validity, for me, needed to be an integral part of this study. By this, I mean the research would be valid if it reflected the collaborative and transformational design of the study. This research was not looking to establish a new knowledge (Altheide and Johnson, 1994) in relation to a new approach to the teaching of reading, but sought a different criterion. In this research, it was hoped that new knowledge would be that of teachers' understandings of teaching reading, which was honestly and openly shared with me. The understandings shared needed to be accurately represented (BERA, 2018; Creswell, 2002) and an honest depiction of the experiences of the people involved in the research (Ely, 1991). Therefore, an

aspect of the validity of this research came from the data collection methods developed for this research. The data collection methods gave the teachers involved in this study an occasion to collaborate and share their multiple understandings of teaching reading and offered validity to this research.

3.5.1 Criteria for Validity

The validity of data collected and the representation of data in my study falls in line with the principles of qualitative research which, Lincoln and Guba (1981) suggest, are very different from those expected in a quantitative study. Principally, the natural setting of the school environment was the prime source of data, and the data obtained was socially situated and socially and culturally saturated (*ibid.*). The natural setting enabled the collective understandings of those involved in this research to be brought together (Altheide and Johnson, 1994). The approach placed me, the participants, the topic and the whole sense-making process in interaction and collaboration, to gain and develop an understanding within the context of the research (*ibid.*). The research was driven by trying to establish an understanding of the teaching of reading.

Given that the aims and intentions of this study were to afford the participants an opportunity to think and work collaboratively to reveal their multiple understandings of teaching reading, it was difficult to follow a checklist to ensure validity (Sutherland and Katz, 2005). However, according to Yardley (2000, 2008) and Elliott (2005), a move away from the typical 'easy to use checklists' (Smith et al., 2009, p.179) is indicative of qualitative research and a move towards a more sophisticated stance. Both Yardley and Elliot suggest there are dangers with checklists for assessment of validity procedures, in that they are too simplistic and prescriptive. Yardley (2008) offers criteria much broader in range to offer a way of establishing validity. Yardley's criteria based on four principles, which I will detail later in this section, related to my research questions, the IPA approach, and offered validation to this study (Hammersley, 1992).

Yardley (2000, 2008) presents four comprehensive principles for assessing the validity of a qualitative piece of research. Yardley argues that sensitivity to context can be addressed through the interactions between the research participants and the researcher had during the interview process (Smith et al., 2009). The research methods selected in my research were carefully considered to develop an interaction with the participants and the data, and as mentioned above, I was mindful of the importance of the context and natural setting in which data were collected (Lincoln and Guba, 1981). The data collection methods were chosen not simply for the outcomes but with a concern for the processes (Cohen et al., 2011). As Smith et al. argue, an inappropriate data collection method can cause interactional differences between the researcher and the participants. Therefore, the methods for data collection were consciously chosen to put the participants at their ease. I had empathy for how the teachers might be feeling during data collection, but also a participant at ease was more likely to respond positively to the research and provide much richer data.

To convey the teachers' own beliefs and to avoid my own biases, the teachers' own views are represented in the thesis in their own words – to allow the reader to extract their own interpretation of the teachers' understandings. I include, in Chapter 4, lengthy verbatim extracts from the transcripts to illustrate my interpretations and argument being made. The transcripts of the non-directive interviews were sent to all the participants, for them to check the accuracy and alter if necessary (Guba and Lincoln, 1995). However, Sousa (2014) suggests that altering the scripts can in some ways de-validate data, as the participants may choose to make corrections that were not apparent at the time of the interview. Although the participants involved did not make any alterations to the original transcripts, I am more inclined to agree with Guba and Lincoln's (1995) view of giving the participants the opportunity to validate the transcripts and alter them if they so wish. In this study, it was not relevant whether or not the scripts were altered by the participants. The aim of this study was to value the participants' voices throughout the collaborative process, whether this was during the interviews or when they reviewed their transcripts in private. The relevance of this research is the participants' understandings of teaching reading. The transcripts, whether altered or not, were still a

representation of the participants' understandings and strengthened the validity of the data in this study, as catching the meaning and understandings was essential (Lincoln and Guba, 1981).

Yardley's second principle for validity is commitment and rigour, both of which can be demonstrated in a number of ways. In taking an IPA approach there was an expectation that the analysis of each of the participants' contributions would be detailed and carried out with care. It was important for me to represent the teachers' voices as accurately as possible. For each participant, I carefully transcribed the recordings of the interviews and used lengthy extracts from the transcripts to represent the participants' voices in the study. Rigour refers to the thoroughness of the study in terms of the appropriateness of the questions and completeness of the analysis undertaken (Elliot, 2005; Hefferon and Gil-Rodriguez, 2011; Yardley, 2000, 2008). The criteria were met with the careful consideration of the research questions and the methods chosen to collect data and how they were cohesive with IPA.

Yardley's third principle is transparency and coherence, which refers to how clearly the stages of the research process are described in the thesis (Smith et al., 2009). As explained earlier in this chapter, I have presented the research process in prose, in a flow diagram (Figure 3-1) and in a table (Figure 3-2) to ensure transparency. I have also been transparent about how I chose the school and participants for my research. In Section 3.3.2 in this chapter, I share the careful process I used to be transparent with the selection of the participants.

I was mindful that the transcribing of the participants' interviews involved a representation of the teachers' voices and needed to capture the exact phrasing used by the teachers during the interview. The concept maps were secured with tape, and photographs were taken at the school, so that the participants could have a copy of the concept maps immediately after completion. Although there are of course commonalities between this research and those adopting alternative qualitative approaches, I have tried to be cautious with my analysis of the data to capture accurately the voices of the participants (Lincoln and Guba, 1981).

Yardley's final principle is impact and importance. Yardley makes the point that the test of impact and importance lies in whether something is interesting, important and useful, and that the reader of the final thesis essentially makes the judgement (Smith et al., 2009). It is difficult to think of one's own work as interesting, important and useful without importing bias, but I have the hope that this piece was a well-conducted piece of research and interesting in its content. It is interesting to hear the voices of classroom practitioners sharing their experience and understanding, as it is a view seldom heard and aligns with the thoughts of Apple (1996) and Evans (2011) in that we may have lost sight of what is actually happening in the classroom. The importance of this research is more interesting, as this research has led to growth and to a change in prior understanding and knowledge (Ely et al., 1991) about the teaching of reading for those involved in the study. Its validation comes not from a body of knowledge, but from the interactions and understandings it offered between the participants and myself (Thomas, 2016).

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Extensive consideration was given to potential ethical issues from the outset, and consistently and increasingly as the research progressed and evolved (Burgess, 1989). It was difficult to anticipate the consequences of the research at the beginning, but I believe I have minimised any potential ethical issues through my awareness and reflective approach to the research (Ely et al., 1991). Ethical considerations are widely understood to have a role in every step of qualitative research (Ely et al., 1991). It was essential to be honest (*ibid.*) and to consider informed consent, anonymity and consequences (BERA, 2018; Burgess, 1989; Cohen et al., 2011; Creswell, 2013).

University and faculty procedures were adhered to, and I secured approval for the research from the Faculty Research Ethics Committee of the university in October 2015. I was aware that research designs are often evolutionary and that my research methods could change. My research questions altered as the study progressed (Ely et al., 1991). I secured permission from the school with my meeting with the headteacher and with follow-up email correspondence, which had included: a

briefing sheet on the research (Appendix 4) and a consent form for each of the teachers taking part in phase two of the data collection (Appendix 10). The staff at the school were introduced to myself and the research briefly at the whole school event. All the teachers were present at the start of the event, and there were no concerns expressed and none of the teachers left the whole school event. They asked questions out of interest rather than being concerned about participating in the research. There was an overwhelming enthusiasm to be involved, and all the teachers felt that they could contribute something to the first phase of the research. In advance of our meeting for phase two of the research, those wishing to take further part in the research were sent a consent form that outlined the research and what their participation would involve (Appendix 10). It was central to this study that the individuals were giving informed consent and any questions they had were answered as fully as possible (Burgess, 1989). The participants taking part in the second phase of the data collection would be recorded during the non-directive interviews. The participants had the opportunity to agree or amend their transcripts before I used the transcripts for analysis. In addition to the transcripts, I also sent over the completed chapter that included lengthy extracts of their transcripts. I wanted to make sure the participants were happy with how they had been depicted (Guba and Lincoln, 1995). The participants were made aware that they could ask to withdraw from the research at any point up to the submission of the thesis (BERA, 2018). The participants signed a consent form which detailed their right to withdraw, and I also reminded the participants of this each time I contacted them regarding the transcripts.

Consideration for the anonymity of the school and all the individuals involved was given careful thought. Every individual was given a pseudonym, and the school was renamed. This took place straight away, and all the data collection records I have referred to include pseudonyms and the renamed school. It was necessary to exclude some of the correspondence between the school and me from the appendices, as the meaning was incoherent without the school or participant context. As a gatekeeper of their identities, I felt it was a necessary safeguard to omit from some of the

transcripts details where I felt the identity of an individual or school could have been revealed (Ely et al., 1991).

The consequences and ultimately the outcomes of my research could have been very different if the working relationships between myself and all the participants had not been so accommodating throughout the study. Time was taken to establish working relationships, and consideration was given where possible to avoid the participants feeling uncomfortable with any stage of the research (Simons, 1987). The collaboration was essential, not just to facilitate the data collection, but as a core epistemological principle of the study. Through collaboration the teachers in this study have had the opportunity to share their knowledge and understandings on the teaching of reading (Torrance, 2006).

3.7 Summary of the Chapter

The positioning of myself in this research was difficult, as there was a complex duality between my roles in the study (Coffey, 1999). It was particularly difficult when I returned to a primary school to collect data for my research. At the time of data collection, I had been out of the classroom less than a year. My role now was as a researcher working as a university lecturer on a postgraduate educational programme. I was not in the school to deliver training or to work on their continuous professional development. I was in the school to value their understanding of the teaching of reading, and to learn how this knowledge had been constructed over time. The research was based on the teaching of reading, something I am passionate about. I had an existing understanding of teaching reading, which had been constructed over time, and in this study I wanted to look beyond my own understanding of teaching reading to establish what other teachers understand. It was hoped that by conducting this research, multiple perspectives and deeper understandings on the teaching of reading would be revealed (Guba and Lincoln, 1995).

In this methodology chapter, I have shared my reasons and interest in undertaking this research and the desire to give the teachers involved in this study a voice. I have explained the

reasons that led me to choose IPA and the rationale behind the choice of data collection methods. As indicated in Figures 3-1 and 3-2, I have detailed the design and procedural processes of my research and how each data collection method relates to my research questions. I have included ethical considerations and reflected on the validity of my research.

The next chapter sets the scene for the data collection and builds on the introduction to Appleberry Primary School by providing more information about the school and the teachers taking part in my study. Lengthy extracts from the teachers' transcripts are provided, in line with the core underpinnings of IPA. I introduce and discuss the emergent themes in the transcripts and focus on just one theme for each teacher. The chapter concludes with an analysis of a master theme that was pertinent to all of the participants.

4 Findings – Emerging Themes

In this chapter, I provide background information on Appleberry Primary School before going on to detail the whole school event. I introduce Emily, Flo, Nancy and Ruby, the four teachers who took part in the non-directive interviews. I provide a brief profile for each teacher before going on to introduce their emergent theme. In Section 4.3 I share and discuss a master theme which appeared in all the teachers' transcripts, and in the final section of Chapter 4, I draw on theoretical perspectives on literacy and discuss what the teachers are saying about teaching reading.

4.1 Setting the Scene

Appleberry Primary School, the selection of which was previously discussed in Chapter 3, Section 3.3.2, was at the time of the data collection still under local authority control but was in the process of joining a multi-academy chain. Information about the school was derived from data provided by the school and through conversations with the headteacher, David. Appleberry is a larger than average-sized primary school with a two form entry. At the time of data collection, there were 435 pupils on roll. Most of the pupils (85 %) were from White British backgrounds, and the proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals was below average at 9.2% (the national average for free school meals was 15.6% (DFE, 2015a)). The proportion of children (15%) who were learning to speak English as an additional language was also below the national average of 19.4% (DFE, 2015a). The percentage of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities was below average too, at just 10% in comparison to the national average of 15.4% (DFE, 2015b). The school was situated in a relatively large town and was within commuting distance of a large city. The school's environs consisted of a balance between local authority housing estates and privately-owned properties. The majority of Appleberry Primary School children lived in the local authority housing, with less than 20% living in privately-owned properties. The school's 2007 amalgamation of an infant and junior school are still apparent on Appleberry's site, in that the school is comprised of two separate buildings, one each for KS1 and KS2, although planning permission has been sought to link the premises with a

covered walkway. There was a noticeable separation between the two phases, and David said that at times it can still present a very real barrier between KS1 and KS2 staff. There were a nursery, breakfast and after-school clubs on the school site. Although the children at Appleberry use these, the management of these latter facilities was private and thus separate from the school.

The collection of data at Appleberry began with the whole school event (see Figure 3-1 for the sequence of data collection). The whole school event, as previously discussed in Section 3.3.4.1, launched the participation of this research with the staff at Appleberry Primary School. The whole school event was attended by seventeen members of teaching staff including the headteacher, David (Figure 3-3). The purpose of the whole school event was to introduce the research and to provide the staff with discussion opportunities on their individual, shared and multiple perspectives and understandings on the teaching of reading. The event was deliberately informal, as the setting for the event needed to be attuned to naturally occurring talk and social interactions (Atkinson and Drew, 1979; Maynard, 2003). I wanted the participants to enjoy the experience, and I hoped to build up trust with them through my interactions with individuals (Coffey, 1999). Through the informal conversations with each other and with myself, the staff at Appleberry shared their understandings and practice on the teaching of reading with an openness and trust. As Pringle et al. (2011) argue, personal accounts are fundamental to interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), and the opportunity to express and discuss personal views on their multiple understandings of teaching reading began at the whole school event. Through collaboration, the staff at Appleberry created a school knowledge on aspects of teaching reading. The participants were encouraged to reflect and share their knowledge, with the intention that teachers in the next stage of the data collection process would use the collaborative knowledge to identify existing and new possibilities within their understanding of teaching reading. The ideas and thoughts the teachers had were agreed, clarified and captured in a statement set (Appendix 7). The statement set was used as a stimulus in the non-directive interviews and the construction of concept maps.

4.2 Emerging Themes

Central to this section are the voices of Emily, Flo, Nancy and Ruby, the teachers who took part in the second phase of this study. Many themes emerged from their transcripts, but I have chosen a theme for each teacher. The allocation of a theme for each person does not, of course, mean that the theme was unique to just that teacher, as there were elements of overlap in the transcripts of all four teachers. Indeed, this chapter concludes with the theme of *enjoyment*, which I felt related to all their shared experiences. The choice and interpretation I present is likely to be affected by my standpoint as a researcher who has an interest in the teaching of reading. I have, however, included substantial extracts of the original transcripts so that the reader can both see my analysis and make their own interpretations of what the voices of the teachers were saying (Smith et al., 2009). For each of the teachers, I have included a small profile at the beginning of their responses to provide context for the reader. In the next section, I introduce Emily and the theme of *time*.

4.2.1 Emily

Emily, a career changer, went to university to complete a degree in education as a mature student. She qualified as a teacher aged 43 and has been teaching for 12 years. She had a connection with the school before being employed as a teacher and has seen many changes during her involvement. Her children (now grown-up) had been pupils at Appleberry before the infant and junior schools amalgamated. As a parent, Emily's involvement with the school has included various roles as a school governor and member of the parent and teacher association (PTA). Before completing her teacher training, Emily worked as a teaching assistant in the school. Emily has always taught in Foundation Stage, although she is moving into Year one for the next academic year. Emily felt she knew the school well, as she has seen so many changes over the time through her various roles.

As Smith et al. (2009) suggest, emergent themes can develop out of echoes and amplifications within a participant's transcript. In Emily's transcript there were many repeated phrases, but it was the theme of *time* that stood out the most. She used *time* to refer to how time is

allocated, how it is limited, types of time (for example, quality time and how she can create additional time). The word appears extensively in her conversation but also suggests how time has an impact on her practice. Time is a compromise that arguably can be traced back to the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy which dictated how and when reading should be taught (Bryan, 2004). The theme of *time* emerged over and over in her transcript, as she tried to emphasise the impact time had on her teaching of reading.

From the outset of the interview, time was a focus for Emily. We began the discussion as Emily started to sort the statements from the statement set (Appendix 7) for the construction of her concept maps. She said, ‘You know we do Read Write Inc. (RWi)⁸ here, it takes up a lot of time.’ Emily began with an example of what happens in the school day concerning reading.

What actually happens in our school now, is that children are sent off to phonics groups.... The groups are decided based on screening checks that we regularly complete in Foundation Stage. So...the phonic groups take up a lot, and I mean a lot of time.... most of the children’s reading experience is done in these groups. The workload is spread across the entire school staff...so you’ve got TAs taking groups, teachers taking groups, and that is the bulk of actual teaching in the morning in school.

Emily’s reference to time, in this extract, appeared to be an indication that she was separating out her thinking in relation to the teaching of reading skills, in line with Dombey’s (2017) warning that policy on teaching reading may encourage reading to be taught as an accrual of disjointed skills and knowledge. The fragmented approach involved not only a change in the physical space of teaching reading as the children were grouped and moved to different rooms, but also a clear indication that the teaching of phonics was in line with current government guidance in the National Curriculum (2014) and taught separately.

⁸ The RWi book is part of the RWi reading scheme. The pictures are simplistic, and the text is phonetically decodable. The focus of the books is to teach the children how to decode and read simple sentences. The stories within the books are often dull and repetitive.

There was a sense in Emily's next extract that the groups and the provision for teaching reading to her whole class were having an impact on her teaching. 'I don't even get to teach my own kids anymore.' She continued with:

We don't officially have guided reading time with our own class, which probably wasn't present in Foundation classrooms anyway, but I always used to read with them individually, and still continue to do so, but time...there's a bigger pressure of time...because now...in excess of an hour and half a day is taken up with the RWi so that is their literacy, which wouldn't be my ideal!

I find myself squeezing time in, to hear them read...that is extra to RWi. In Foundation it's a little bit easier to do that, because we have a bit more autonomy to do those things. I'm not sure how they manage in the other year groups.

What is interesting here is that Emily feels she needs to do more to teach children to read than the provision made in the RWi groupings. This aligns with the thinking of Roche (2015) that there are neglected aspects of teaching reading in using the current SVR reading model in schools. Emily chose terms such as 'pressure', 'excess' and 'taken up' to describe how the RWi group provision takes up time. It appears that Emily feels the time given to the RWi groupings is a loss of time for a more holistic approach to teaching reading (Clark, 2017; Roche, 2015). The prescriptive nature of the RWi groups for Emily chimes with the ideas of Leland et al. (2005) that teachers are just technicians delivering other peoples' ideas. There was a sense that Emily did not value the time used for the RWi groups, and perceived the groupings as separate to the bigger picture of learning to read – indeed, almost as an element interruptive to her overall provision of teaching reading. Time, or the apparent lack of time, appeared to be compromising Emily's practice, as she said:

We can't do as much of what I call the 'background of learning to read' ...and it is unfair to expect the children to engage in any length of formal lesson when they return from an hour or so of RWi. They are only four and five and we have to fit maths in somewhere!

It is not clear from the transcript what Emily means by the 'background of learning to read', but she pointed to the statements on her concept map (Figure 4-1) which she titled 'my ideal for teaching reading'. Statements on her concept map included many areas commentators have warned are being squeezed out of reading provision (Bearne and Reedy, 2018; Clark, 2017; Comber, 2003; Cremin et al.,

1997; Leland et al., 2013; Meek, 2004; Roche, 2015; Ryan and Deci, 2000) and thus promoting an impoverished teaching provision (Clark, 2017).

However, Emily has found ways around the timetabling of RWi, to find methods to enrich the children's reading experience and align her practice with her own understandings on teaching reading. She has tried to make the process of learning to read more cohesive and holistic rather than deconstructing reading into sub-skills (Mercer and Littleton, 2007). In the next extract, Emily talks about how she makes links for the children learning to read with language, which chimes with Goswami's (1992, 2015) advocacy of transparency regarding the link between understanding the spoken language and the readiness to learn to read written representations. Emily starts the day with a story to give the children a shared talking point, which aligns with Meek's (2004) view that exposure to rich involvement with quality texts is crucial for learning to read, through providing the children with opportunities to make sense of reading for understanding.

We are lucky here that we are still allowed to encourage child-initiated learning with the children, which gives me a chance to offer the children a much richer experience of learning to read.

It is really important for me to provide the children with an environment that is rich with language. We talk a lot! Any opportunity to talk and we do. I try to make sure that books have a big presence in the classroom...book corner, boxes, and stories whenever I can squeeze one in. I like to start the day with a story, it sets the tone for day and gives a shared experience we can all talk about. Learning to read takes time, and that is something I recognise but can sometimes be overlooked by others.

The children who attend here...almost all of the children start school unable to read and very few have interacted with books. We are up against it from the start, I have to find time to get them interested in reading. RWi doesn't get them interested in reading...it doesn't get them reading either.

So yeah...I try to make the environment literacy rich, and squeeze in where possible, role play, oral storytelling, talking about story endings and changing them, that sort of thing. It's not ideal or best practice for me, as it's not enough, especially as they don't get any kind of stimulus at home. I do what I can to get them interested.

Emily's teaching of reading is an approach that encompasses far more than one particular programme. She sees their whole learning experience as an integral part to the children becoming

accomplished readers and tries to 'squeeze in' much richer opportunities for the children. This aligns with Rosen's (2014) view that the long-term effects of neglecting broader reading skills in favour of reading strands that can be easily measured are detrimental to children's enjoyment of reading. It appears that Emily tries, with her practice, to fill in the gaps left behind by policy and the use of reading schemes. Emily claimed:

[W]e are here to give the children a better start to school...but we are pushing them all the time to work at a prescribed pace.

Emily appeared frustrated and she said:

Not all my kids can talk properly...let alone learn to pronounce sounds and learn to read.

The children love to talk so I always make sure that they get opportunities to talk. We talk about books, listen to individual stories, play games, that sort of thing. Interestingly...now we are at the end of the Foundation year, the children are enjoying and listening to longer stories, and they enjoy talking about what has happened before. Stories in the early part of the school year were always being interrupted with other timetable expectations, so I was finding that slightly longer stories were being left unfinished. We've found a way around that though...with chat. We talk about what we can remember and use pictures under the visualiser. It's a challenge for some of the children to remember but with pictures and the talk it seems to be working. I wouldn't have done it this way before, but because of the pressure on time, I've had to find a way around it. It works and I'm pleased the kids are getting something from it.

In the interview, Emily acknowledged that she has had to change her practice as a teacher primarily because of new school initiatives. She has found a way to continue with her beliefs and individual practice, and she talks about providing opportunities, managing interruptions and finding ways around the lack of time. Nevertheless, she added:

Everything we do include, is rushed for them [the children], there is no quality of time for the children to enjoy the experience.

Emily, prompted by two statements 'visits to libraries' and 'visits to bookshops', talked about the children being rushed, and she gave the example of a recent school visit to the library and how they are now restricted to one hour for a visit. Emily explained that the time restriction arises due to a number of reasons, but the primary consideration seemed to be the use of school staff, which are crucial to the structure of the learning in the school morning.

Everything is rushed, the kids are even rushed at home. The children are expected to read every night to their parents but it seems that this is squeezed in at bedtime...probably when the children are most tired and really they should be having a bedtime story and quality time with mum and dad. That doesn't happen much either. I try to promote the value of bedtime stories with the parents and children, but it's surprising how many children don't have this experience, it's really sad...isn't it?

As Emily sifted her way through the statement set, she picked out the statement 'books with words the children can read alone'. Her immediate response was:

This is another problem with RWi, they spend ages learning and blending sounds, but they still can't access the words in none [*sic*] RWi books because they haven't done that yet.

Emily contrasts the RWi provision with that of Letters and Sounds⁹:

They are just not reading enough stories when they start...they have to go quite a way with RWi before they actually even get a book. I don't think they are getting the opportunities to recognise that these sounds are in all books. I am not even sure that they recognise that books are linked to RWi at the beginning. For me it would save time if we went back to Letters and Sounds. That way we could be looking at books, non-phonetic words, learning new sounds, sight vocabulary – it is a much more joined up approach for the kids...and me. I try to do this with the children in class, but because they all go off to different groups it's hard to make the links and it takes more time than if I had the children all the time.

This was a fundamental issue for Emily as she clearly wanted to provide the best provision for the children, and the lack of continuity appears to be problematic for the way she would ideally want to teach the children. At this point in the interview, she asked if we could stop the recording for a moment:

...as I'm getting frustrated and that's not what this is about [by 'this', Emily referred to the interview and data being collected]

Emily needed a moment to calm herself and begin again – she said:

Sorry, I just get so frustrated with the school approach [the RWi Scheme followed by the school] and I am limited with what I can do because of the groupings and the amount of time it takes up.

⁹ Letters and Sounds (2007) was a Primary National Strategy for the teaching of phonics, although not statutory. Letters and Sounds focused on phonics instruction in a systematic way, but also placed an emphasis on the development of speaking and listening.

Finally, the last extract from the transcript exemplifies how Emily felt the pressure to ensure the children are learning to read.

Not all the children are ready to read when they first come into school or even later, and I don't think we should force them. You get parents in saying that their child does not want to read at home and I say, 'Just leave it for a few weeks and then try again'. That's not the official line we take at school but when the parents are anxious and the children are not willing it seems crazy to force them. I tend to give the child extra time and possibly a different approach. There is a pressure on parents too, and they are not always willing to take time out from teaching their child to read. In school we have lots of systems in place to pick up a child that is not learning to read...again it is just pressure on the child and it can do more harm than good.

At the end of the non-directive interview, I asked Emily to talk through her concept maps and explain her thinking on her organisation of the maps. Emily said:

I've included in map one [Figure 4-1] statements which I think are important for children to have in place before the technical side of learning to read begins. The problem with this map is everything on it takes a lot of time with very little evidence that the children are actually learning to read.

Well they wouldn't do well on the phonic screening test! All these statements prepare children for becoming a reader, putting a purpose behind the technical side which should come later. Children who have opportunities to do these statements seem to be the better readers in the long term. This is what I like to do with the children and still do, but it is compromised because of the groupings in the morning.

Emily's first map shows how she has placed the statements from the statement set (Appendix 7). She does not suggest a priority or hierarchy for any of the statements on her first concept map (Figure 4-1). Instead, the statements were placed on the map as being essential skills to acquire before the children can begin formal instruction for learning to read. Emily gave the concept map the title, 'My ideal for teaching early reading'. Emily's first concept map did not include anything to do with phonics instruction, which she acknowledged when she talked about her second concept map. Emily recognised that phonics can be taught alongside all of the statements on her first concept map (Figure 4-1) but wanted to reflect on how narrow she felt the practice of phonics had become in her school.

In Emily's second concept map (Figure 4-2), she grouped together statements which she said all linked to the technical side of learning to read, and this was how she justified the grouping:

I think these statements are all important and they all relate to phonics. These I could have linked with my first map, as I think phonics can be taught alongside what is happening in the background, but I wanted to show that I think phonics is more than what we do here at school with RWi. You see we just teach pure sounds here, but phonics is about so much more. It is about seeing patterns in words, both what they see and hear, playing with words, and enjoying the sounds. This group also includes what we...the school think is important and what we keep track of, phonic knowledge, high frequency words etc. It is the biggest part of the teaching time and administration time too.

Emily's second concept map is reflective of her understanding of teaching phonics, and she compares her understandings to the RWi approach used at Appleberry. Emily's understanding of teaching phonics is more in line with Dombey's (2017) view and builds, for example, on the basis that children have an awareness that written words can be transferred into meaning, an awareness of environmental print, and recognition of their own names. Dombey (2017) suggests that analytic phonics is more appropriate for children who have already begun to develop an awareness of reading. Emily captured this awareness on her first map (Figure 4-1).

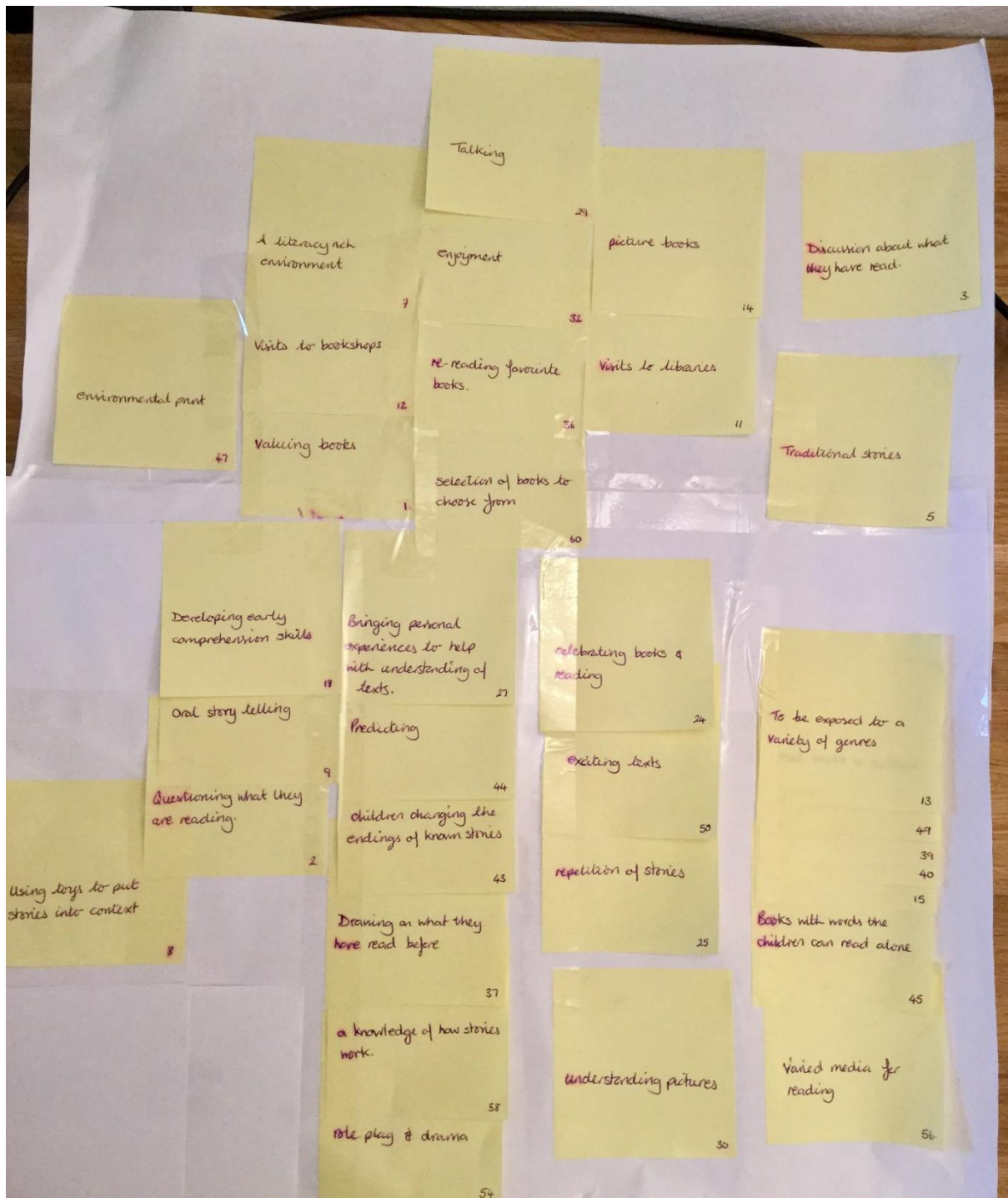


Figure 4-1 Emily's concept map 1 – Emily's ideal for teaching early reading

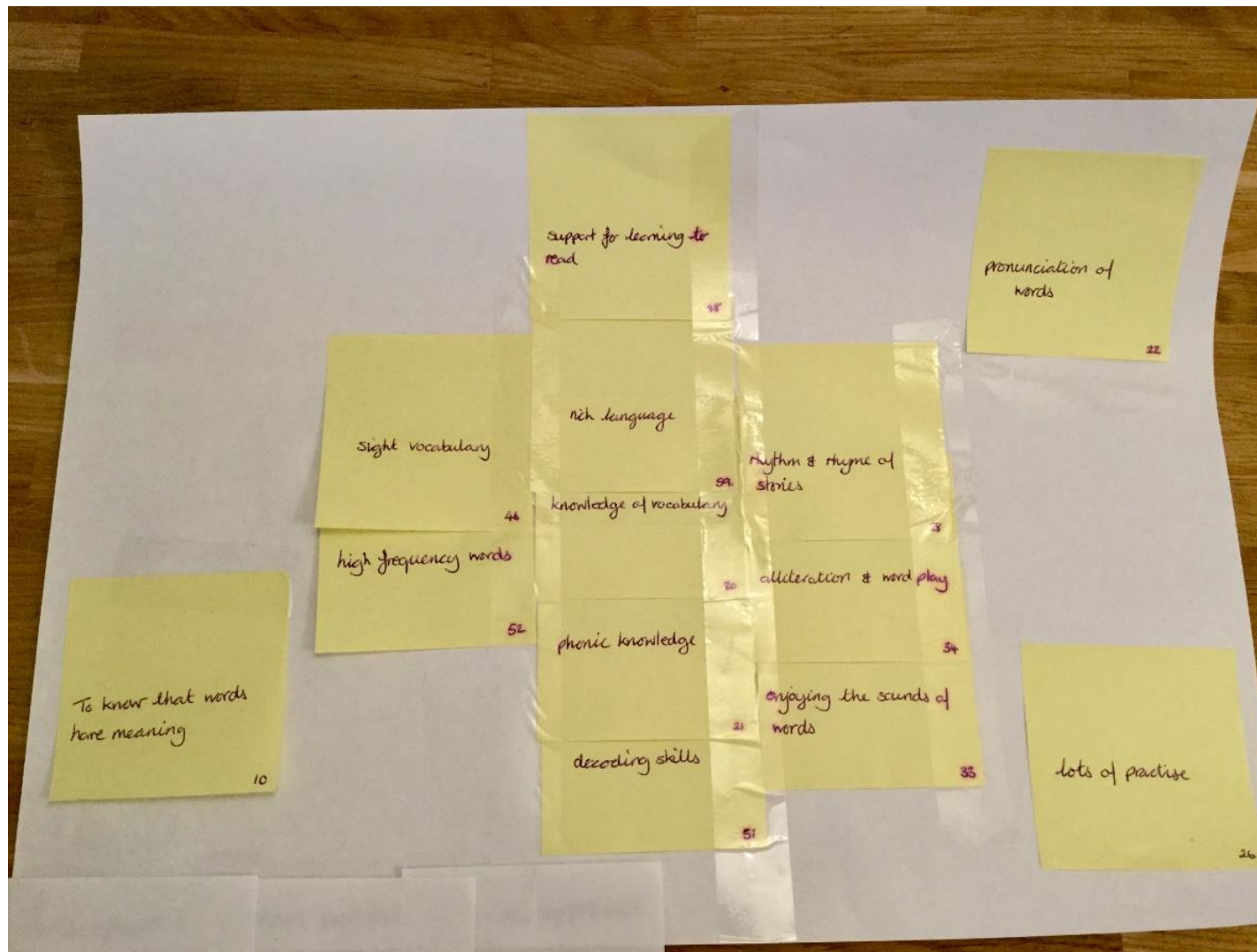


Figure 4-2 Emily's concept map 2 – Phonics but more than RWi

Emily's third concept map [Figure 4-3] included statements that she felt were beyond her control in the classroom. Some of the statements were placed on this map because of time pressures on the teaching timetable, but mostly they were statements that related to the children's home life, which she acknowledged were challenging to influence.

These are all important statements and I think make the difference between becoming a reader and someone who can read. I try to read to the children as often as possible, as it is important for them to see that there is pleasure in reading. Pleasure in reading can be disguised for the children when you have a focus on RWi. I wish all parents read to their children – but we know that just doesn't happen everywhere.

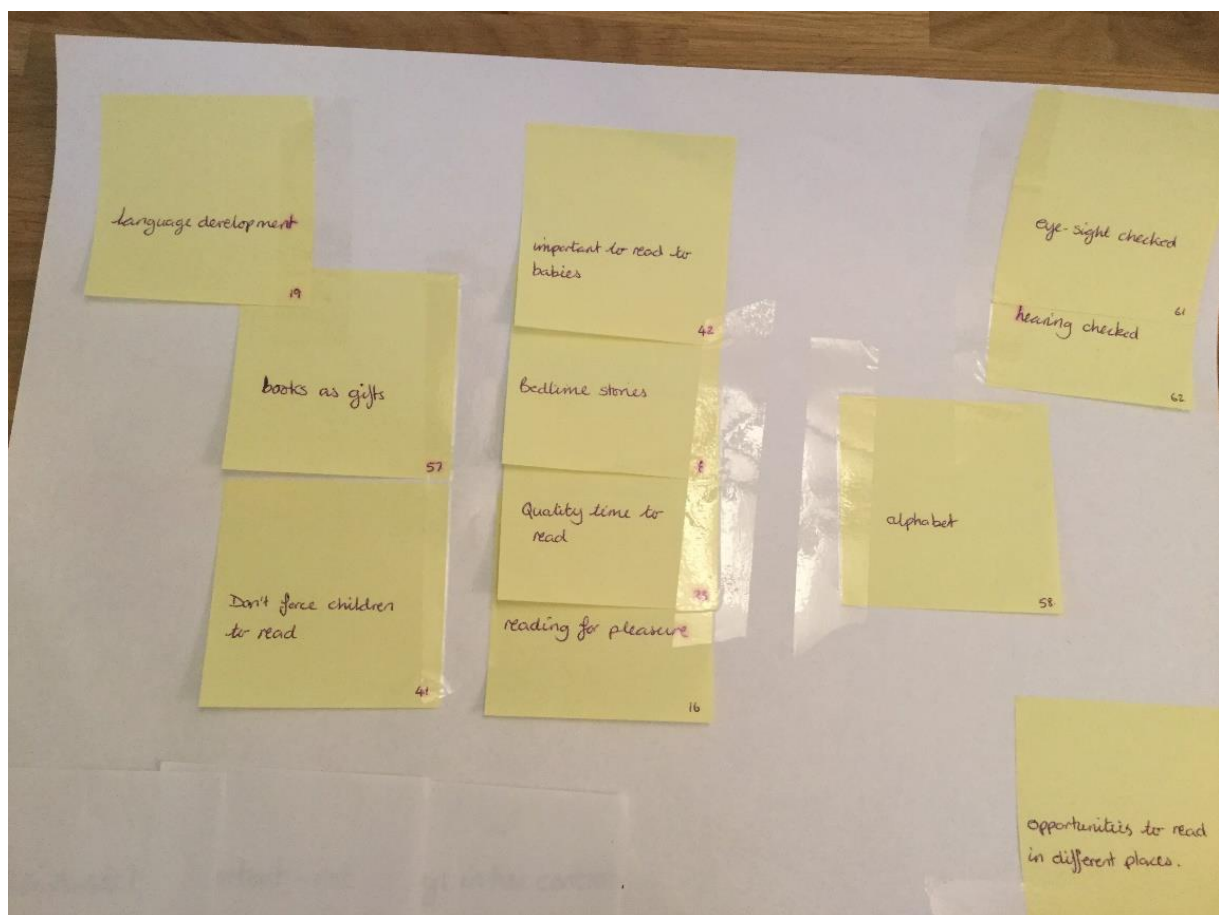


Figure 4-3 Emily's concept map 3 – Not always in her control

4.2.2 Reflection on Emily

At the heart of Emily's practice appeared to be the sense that she wanted to provide the children with the richest reading experience possible. Yet, time has become an obstacle for Emily's teaching. Her use of the terms 'quality time', 'it takes up a lot of time', 'squeezing time in', 'I have to find time' and 'everything...is rushed for them' all evidence frustration at how time is having an impact on her teaching of reading. Throughout the transcript, there was a clear sense that Emily feels pressure, although I would argue that some of the pressure is self-imposed. Emily could have been the craft-based technician willing to adopt the delivery of a prescribed programme (Furlong, 2010; Whitty, 2014). Instead, she placed additional pressure on herself with her own understandings of teaching reading. Emily talked about how initiatives have encroached on her time and are arguably impacting on her ideal practice of teaching reading. Emily is not alone with her beliefs on teaching reading. Bearne and Reedy (2018) argue that the best teachers of reading are those that have expert knowledge about how children learn to read and take the time to create a language-rich environment. Emily recognised that learning to read was much more than learning sounds: at the core of her practice was the spoken language and creating opportunities for the children to talk. Roche (2015) suggests that teachers, like Emily, should create authentic and meaningful language opportunities that develop, enhance and sustain language growth and understanding in children. Emily understands, as Bearne and Reedy (2018) note, that talk underpins and is an essential component of learning to be a reader. Throughout Emily's transcript, she references the importance of talk and the understanding she has of the interdependence between reading and talk (Warner, 2013). For Emily, meaning is central for learning to read and having many opportunities to talk helps children to make meaning and to develop their understanding of the spoken and written word, seeing the process of learning to read as holistic. Notably, Chall (1983) advised that reading consisted of stages including the development of children's spoken language. However, as Emily says, 'learning to read takes time', and the approach taken by the school does not appear to align with her understanding of teaching reading. The school's approach does not permit sufficient time for Emily to

‘pay more attention to children’s attitudes, their preferences, pleasures and perceptions of themselves as readers in order to help ensure that they develop as readers who not only can but do choose to read, for pleasure and life’ (Cremin, 2007, p.167). Emily’s reservation seems to arise from the one-size-fits-all approach taken up by the school, which she recognised as not working for all the children in her class. Emily’s view chimes with that of Arrow and Tumner (2012), who argue that the one-size-fits-all approach is unhelpful for children entering school with different literacy needs. Emily said:

Not all my kids can talk properly, let alone learn to pronounce sounds and learn to read and not all the children are ready to read when they first come into school.

In Emily’s transcript, the theme of *time* was prevalent, but it was likely that her frequent references to time were a result of time pressures and frustration with how she was expected to teach reading. Emily tried to fill the gaps between what the school was prescribing and what the children need to learn to read in pursuit of their becoming successful readers. Many of Emily’s references to time were driven by her concern that the children were missing out on the much broader reading experiences.

4.2.3 Flo

Flo began her teaching career after a successful and established career in finance. She completed her PGCE in her early forties and specialised as an Early Years’ practitioner. Flo worked in two schools before taking up her first leadership post as Foundation Stage Lead at Appleberry Primary School, a position successfully applied for under the previous headteacher. She had worked at Appleberry for nearly three years at the time data was collected. Flo has made some changes to the Early Years practice in the school and has focused her attention on the outside learning environment for the children. Flo values the outside environment as a vehicle for the children’s development and has therefore focused her attention on developing an authentic and meaningful experience for the children. The outside environment was an area of development recommended during the last school Ofsted inspection and also became a priority for the school to provide children with new

opportunities to develop, enhance and sustain language growth. Flo felt that after three years of working at Appleberry Primary she knew the staff, parents and children of the school and acknowledged that the school was not without its fair share of challenges.

Smith et al. (2009) suggest that emergent themes can develop from contradictions and paradoxes within the participant's transcript, and many conflicts emerged in Flo's voice. Although *conflict* was a theme for all of the participants, Flo's sense of conflict was more distinct, with her transcript revealing high levels of conflict with herself, management and policy. When we began the interview Flo made apologies for the state of her classroom, saying:

I've just noticed the first statement is 'a rich literacy environment.' I apologise for the blank canvas of a room. We are being decorated over the summer and all the walls are having to be stripped as the decorators wanted to see how much prep work is required. Isn't it a depressing place at the moment! I'd like to show a picture, if I may, of the classroom before it was stripped.

To support her statement, Flo showed me a picture of the classroom before it was stripped for the decorators. She was proud of the photo and went on to explain how she values a literacy-rich classroom environment.

We've got this new obsession here of looking corporate, clean walls with quotes painted on the walls. I am not sure of the value of this at the moment, but everything needs to be tucked away and only brought out when relevant. They don't want the kids to be distracted – it's always relevant isn't it? The SLT [senior Leadership Team] don't seem to see the value in a rich and stimulating environment, or it's cheaper to do it the corporate way. Either way it doesn't sit well with me! Kids need to be engaged with the world around them, not living in a sterile environment. The classroom should be...a bright and colourful place with plenty of stimulus to develop their questioning skills, which is important for learning to read, it's going to make the job harder if there is nothing new to talk about around the room.

There appeared to be a conflict here for Flo, and one she said was going to be difficult for her to accept. Flo did not refer to how much involvement she had with the decision for the new approach for classroom displays to be implemented from the following September or on what evidence this was based. There was no mention either of a leadership discussion involving her role as Foundation Stage Lead, but the conflict in the extract 'it doesn't sit well with me' appeared to be with the management

of the school. Flo's views on the classroom environment aligned with Bielby's (1998) and Dombey's (2013) emphasis on the importance and contribution the classroom environment makes to children's development in learning to read.

In the next extract Flo responded to the prompt drawn from the statement set 'phonic knowledge'. She began her response by explaining how she has already altered her view on the use of RWi:

When I first got here I was sceptical about RWi, it was not what I was used to. I completed the training [RWi in school training] and yes, the Foundation Stage children make clear progress with it, they are all reading.

The choice of the word 'sceptical' suggests that Flo has already had a previous conflict with RWi, which might imply that her previous beliefs on the teaching of reading did not align with the RWi approach. However, as she continued, she began to question her phrase 'they are all reading', in the sense that progressing well with phonics does not necessarily mean that the children are reading.

You can sense a 'but' coming, can't you!... But, there is something not quite right with it...it seems to remove them from all other aspects of reading. I suppose this is how we have had to structure it through the school. They miss out on listening to stories, gazing at pictures, and talking about stories.

Although Flo was not saying directly that she was in conflict with the RWi approach taken, she did begin to consider what the children were not receiving as part of the programme. Her thinking changed and conflicted with her statement 'they are all reading' as Flo re-examined her understanding of what being able to read means. Flo recognised, as Siraj-Blatchford and Sylva (2004) note, that there may be early gains to be made using systematic synthetic phonics, but questioned whether these related to reading.

In the next extract, Flo criticised the RWi structure and approach and began to consider how she adapted her own classroom teaching:

That's another thing with RWi, there is no talking in the entire lesson. Not for the children. They just get to repeat and say the sounds, blend the sounds into words and then eventually read out loud simple sentences from the books. That's not talking, even I am expected to use silent signals to move the lesson on – it's all

very odd. When I'm being observed I follow the prescription, but find it difficult not to engage the children in discussions and stick to the script when it's just us.

What was interesting here was that Flo was challenging the RWi approach which she previously claimed was teaching the children to read. Flo's conflict was now with policy, as SSP is an isolated approach not principally concerned with the construction of meaning but on decoding words (Pearson, 2004). Flo understands that there is an interdependence between talk and reading (Warner, 2013), that the SSP alone is not sufficient to learn to read, and that other integral parts such as talk are contributors to the process (Goswami, 2015).

Flo selected two statements from the set which she felt were linked, 'quality time to read' and 'support for learning to read'. She said:

These two [statements] are so important, but time isn't often available in school to hear the children read. We are relying on the children reading at home.

Flo began to share how her provision for the children's reading at home conflicted with the school's expectations. She talked about the school expectation for the children to take an RWi book home every evening.

I refuse to give them just an RWi book to take home, it's hardly a book that they can share and enjoy with their parent. We have huge boxes of books here that the children can choose a book from and take one home as an extra to the RWi text. It's not ideal, as the school expectation in Foundation and KS1 is that they still read and complete the RWi text, so some parents do just what is required with their children and no more. Unfortunately, that is the RWi book, which is far from fascinating. It's not going to develop a love of reading or any other skills for that matter.

Flo's choice of the word *refuse* is a strong choice but seemed reflective of the conflict between her ideals for home reading and the school's official position. Flo's view aligns with the wealth of evidence that suggests that sharing books regularly with parents can lead to higher engagement and success with learning to read (Comber, 2003; Cremin et al., 1997; Leland et al., 2013; Meek, 2004; Roche, 2015; Ryan and Deci, 2000; Wigfield and Guthrie, 1998). However, Ofsted (2017) aligns with the view that children only need to take home reading material that includes the phonemes that

children have learned or are learning. Flo tries to address her conflict with the management's expectations by giving her pupils children's literature to read at home. Flo said:

They are getting a double helping of RWi – which has got to have long-term consequences, hasn't it?

In the next extract Flo responded to the statement 'don't force children to read'. Throughout the interview, Flo had been buoyant and confident with her responses, but the level of her voice dropped to a bare whisper.

We shouldn't have to force children to read, if everything is in place they will want to read... I say to a parent, 'If your child doesn't want to read, then just read to them'... I'm not sure how that would go down with SLT. We force them to read here...we have to, there is an expectation that children will make progress, such a pressure on the children...and us. If they are refusing to try to read they are most likely to be labelled and interventions are put in place. This happens far too early in my opinion... It just turns the children off reading and then we have a battle with them, rather than just giving them the time and trying different approaches to encourage them to read.

Flo's view on not forcing the children to read aligns with the view of TACTYC (Tutors of Advanced Courses for Teachers of Young Children), which proposes that teachers should use their professional judgement and withhold phonics from children who are not yet ready for it (2017). Towards the end of the non-directive interview, Flo turned her attention to how she had grouped the statements on the concept maps. I asked Flo to talk me through her groupings, which she had already considered titles for. Figure 4-4 is Flo's map 'Going on in the background'. She did not give a priority to any of the statements. She said:

I think...I've grouped these together as I personally value these as important to read, and I know that with my own children this was all in place before they started school so they were ready to learn to read. In school these statements are not valued and I find this difficult to accept. Well...no...they are valued, but not given a special amount of time...or priority. I suppose they don't factor in the test scores.

There are things we could do in this group, but...again other priorities have taken over, for example the school environment and the choice to have a corporate feel in the school. The school library is always in use for booster groups with children in the upper school. SATs revision I suspect.

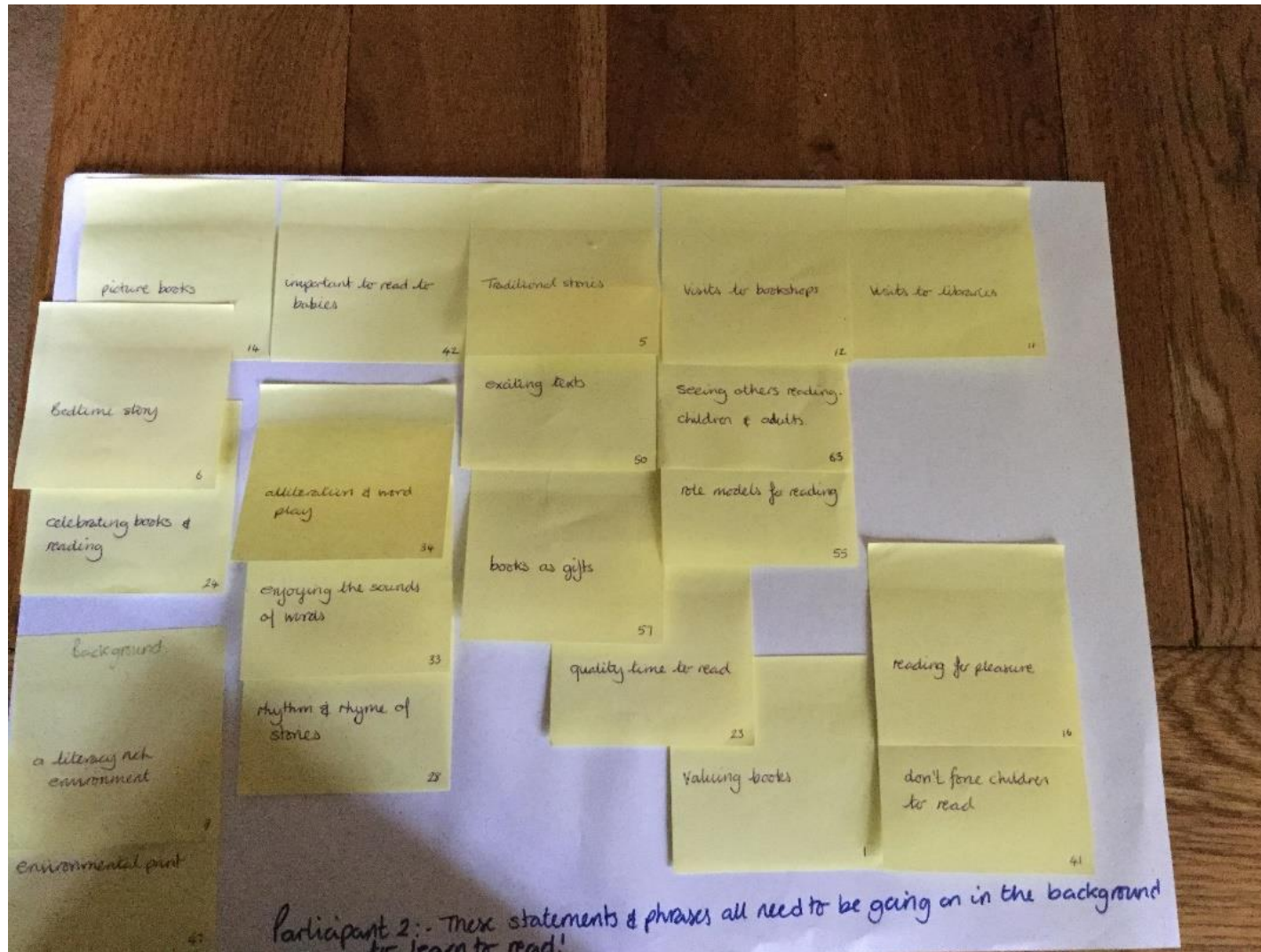


Figure 4-4 Flo's concept map 1 – Going on in the background

Although not explicit in the language that she chose to describe the practice going on in the background, Flo appeared to suggest that the statements placed on this map were missed from the routine practice of the school.

As Flo reviewed her second map (Figure 4-5), she talked about the technical aspect of teaching reading and how they now teach this separately with RWi. The arrangement of Flo's map does not quite align with the extreme form of SSP, which permits no teaching of sight vocabulary (Dombey, 2017), or as Dehaene (2009) advocates, mastery of phonemes as essential groundwork before anything else can be put in place for learning to read. The concept map is, however, reflective of the RWi scheme.

These have all become very prescriptive and taught in an order...for monitoring I suspect. It's not the way I would like to do it, and not as I've taught in the past but the school have bought this massive expensive thing...RWi and we have to do it!... You can't argue with the early progress though, you can see it quite rapidly in Foundation Stage. Although, I'm absolutely sure it will have an impact later on, with their reading if they don't have all the background points on the other map (Flo refers and points to the map in Figure 4-4).

As Flo discussed Figure 4-5, a conflict emerged with her own understandings or at least with her previous understandings on the use of RWi. At the beginning of the interview, Flo discussed how she had previously been sceptical about RWi, but could not argue with the results the approach appeared to achieve. However, in this extract, there was a sense that Flo was unhappy with using RWi, as she said 'we have to do it'. It was unclear from the transcript whether this change in thinking was because Flo had now considered the much wider concept of learning to read, or that she had re-evaluated her understanding of RWi. What was clear from the extract was that she did not alter her view that the use of RWi enabled clear progress for the children with their reading, and she recognised the early gains made by using the SSP approach (Siraj-Blatchford and Sylva, 2004). However, as Siraj-Blatchford and Sylva (2004) point out, early gains achieved with the use of systematic synthetic phonics are short-lived. In Flo's statement, there appeared to be direct support for Siraj-Blatchford and Sylva's argument. Flo recognised the early gains achieved by using SSP but also recognised, as Siraj-Blatchford and Sylva warn, that the RWi approach, if not substantiated with

other material, will have a detrimental impact on children's reading later. By applying a deeper level of interpretation, it could be suggested that Flo was demonstrating a conflict between her own personal understandings of what teaching reading should be juxtaposed with the children's progress in reading. Flo, the Foundation Stage Lead at Appleberry, was aware of the short-term gains related to the use of SSP, and the gains are arguably advantageous for accountability purposes. However, Flo also acknowledged that the short-term gains with the use of SSP, as Clark (2017) and Wrigley (2017) warn, have a negative impact on children's reading in the longer term.

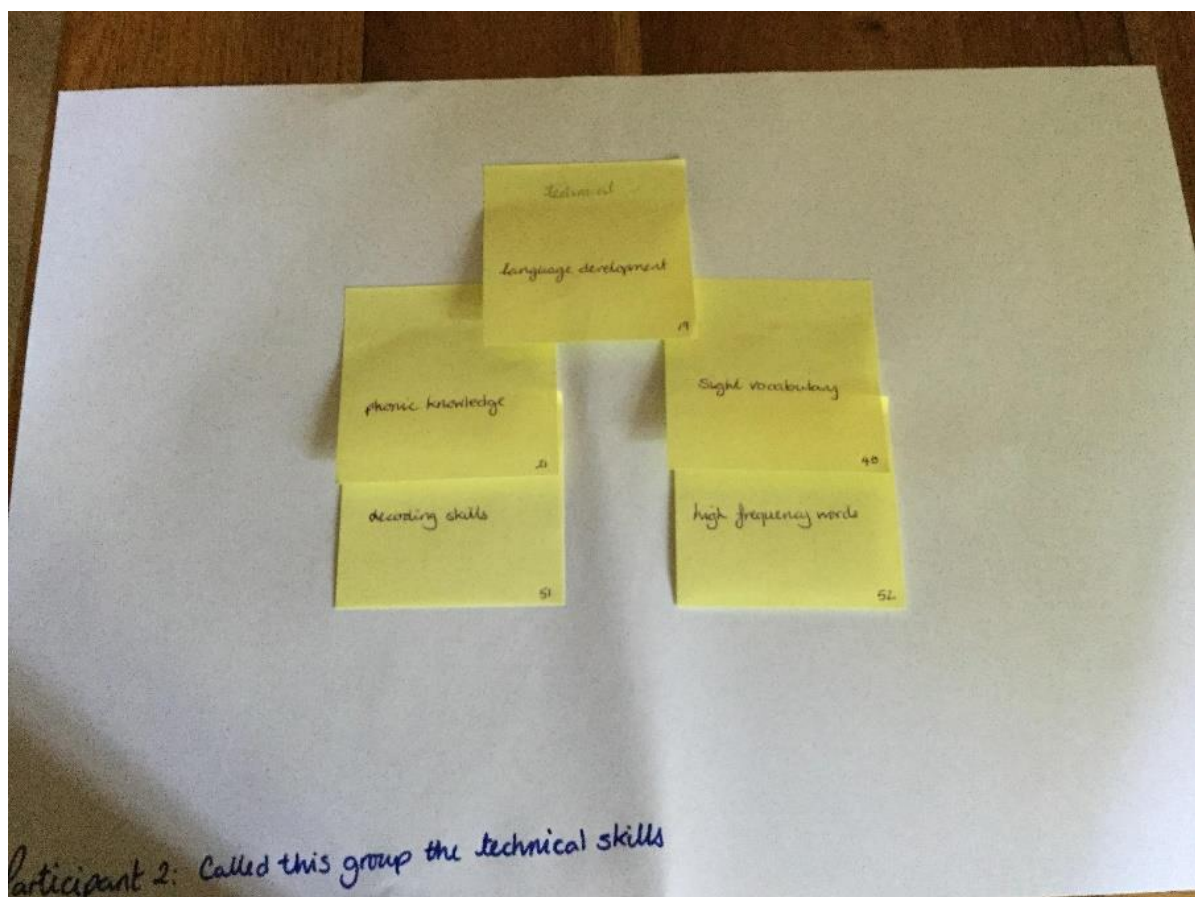


Figure 4-5 Flo's concept map 2 – Technical skills

Flo's third and final map, which she discussed during the non-directive interview, was the group she called 'Understanding what they read' (Figure 4-6). In her explanation for grouping these statements together Flo talks about how it is important for her to make the links between decoding and understanding for the children. Flo said:

If I just think about the expectations for the Foundation phase, we don't really have to prove what they understand in their reading. The emphasis in the school is all about evidencing saying the sound, recognising the grapheme, and blending them together. We could completely ignore the children's understanding and the problem, I'm sure, would emerge later in the school... But it is important for me to make sure the children understand that the words have meaning... That stories have meaning. So this group of statements are things I try to do with the children when I can. We still have child-initiated activities in the afternoon and I like to encourage them with dressing up and understanding the stories we have read through role play. Previously this would have been all linked together in the main lesson, but we have structures to follow now.

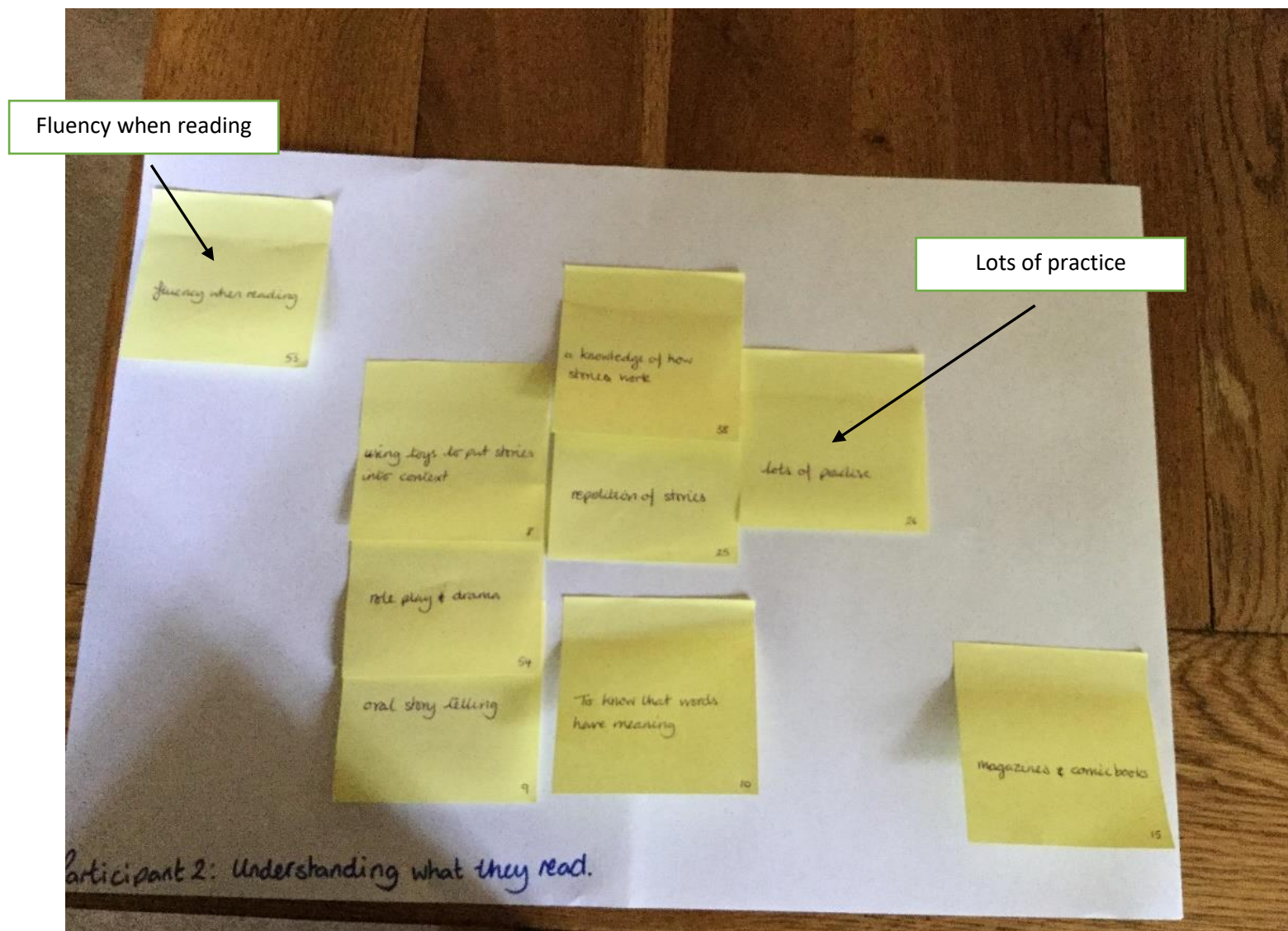


Figure 4-6 Flo's concept map 3 – Understanding what they read

4.2.4 Reflection on Flo

The language Flo chose in the interview was striking. Her use of the phrases ‘it’s going to make the job harder’, ‘it doesn’t sit well with me’, ‘we have to’ and ‘I’m not sure how that would go down with SLT’ are all illustrative of Flo’s discord with the school’s approach to teaching reading. In Flo’s transcript, it was easy to see how difficult it had been for her to find and maintain the right balance between the needs of the children and the school expectations. At the heart of Flo’s practice appeared to be the understanding Clark (2017) argues for, that teaching reading should be approached from an analysis of the skills and knowledge children have already acquired when they begin to learn to read. This approach, which resonates with findings from Goodman, Fries and Strauss (2016), is far more complex than just decoding words, and requires more than the use of systematic synthetic phonics to become an accomplished reader. In Flo’s discussion of her practice, she illustrated how fragmented the teaching of reading could become if teachers do not take into account the complexity of learning to read. For example, at the end of Flo’s interview, she summarised the school expectations for teaching reading in Foundation stage:

We don’t really have to prove what they understand in their reading. The emphasis in the school is all about evidencing saying the sound, recognising the grapheme, and blending them together. We could completely ignore the children’s understanding, and the problem, I’m sure, would emerge later in the school.

Flo’s thoughts on the school’s approach to teaching reading illustrated how there was a divide between what they are expected to teach and what needed to be taught for the children to learn to read. Clark (2017), Goodman, Fries and Strauss (2016), and Goodman, Calfee and Goodman (2014) have all warned that an imbalance between phonics provision and broader reading skills will have a detrimental effect on the outcomes of children’s reading. Getting the balance right was essential for Flo, and she discussed ways to accommodate policy with her own understandings on teaching reading. Flo wrestled with the conflict between accountability and the best provision for the children in her class. As part of her interpersonal and role conflict (Ball, 2013), Flo tried to make independent professional decisions on the teaching of reading, but inevitably her practice was compromised.

4.2.5 Nancy

Nancy joined Appleberry Primary School as an NQT (Newly Qualified Teacher) and had just completed her second year of teaching at the time of data collection. She began her teaching career as a teaching assistant and gained her qualification through a part-time school-based route. Once qualified she was offered a position at Appleberry. She has now taught in Year 5 and Year 6. Nancy is passionate about reading herself and wants to encourage the same passion in the children. Nancy was enthusiastic about taking part in the research.

Smith et al. (2009) argue that the interview will spark new reflections by the participant, and all the participants in my study were no exception. Nancy through her reflections questioned her practice and at times critiqued her teaching. Many themes emerged in Nancy's voice, but it was the theme of *the questioning self* that stood out the most. Although all the teachers to some extent questioned their practice, Nancy's sense of questioning was more distinct, with her transcript revealing disclosure of what she does now and how she intended to adapt her practice in the future after self-questioning.

When we began the interview, Nancy was in deep thought while she read each of the statements. As Nancy worked her way through the Post-it notes she said, 'Admittedly there are things here I don't do... I've not really thought about them I suppose'. Selecting the statement 'bringing personal experiences to help with understanding of texts', Nancy said:

Gosh!... this is a massive oversight on my part, I've never considered drawing on the children's personal experience. I've perhaps made links with my own experience...but never considered giving the children opportunities to draw on theirs. I feel a bit ashamed about that now... something I need to think about that's for sure. The last book we read, as a class, I'd chosen because they potentially could relate to the characters, but not given them the opportunity to do it. I need to think about how I might do that at the start of next year...with my new class.

Nancy's reflection appeared to align with Donnelly's (1994) thinking in that children are dependent on their own personal histories, concrete experiences and sometimes imaginations to make sense of what they are reading. Nancy in the statement above recognised that drawing on the children's

experiences was something she had overlooked and aimed to consider how she might include this in her future practice.

Nancy began to group the statements to construct a concept map. As she built the concept map, she indicated that the map was constructed around what she currently included in her teaching, as she repeated the phrase 'Yep, I do that and that'. Nancy appeared to interpret the statement set as an opportunity to reflect on her whole practice of teaching reading. She began to syphon off statements that she felt were not currently included in her practice as she said:

I'd like to do more of these – I am going to label this map, things I want to do more of (Figure 4-7 and Figure 4-8).

Nancy chose the statement 'non-fiction text' and said:

Non-fiction for example, I am not as enthusiastic about non-fiction, not like I am with fiction. I read a lot of fiction, both children's literature and books for my own pleasure. I think I have probably talked about fiction books every day in school with the children, but can't recall doing the same with non-fiction.

I am not sure I have any decent non-fiction books – I need to make a list of what I've got...and perhaps think about getting some new books in...and how to bring them into the learning. Perhaps to link with the topics we are doing next term. That would be a start wouldn't it?

We have a school library, which I only use for booster groups. There are lots of non-fiction books in there. I'll have a look at what we have got – this is a good time to be thinking like this.

We can choose the texts we use for English lessons, but have less autonomy for guided reading. It is very prescriptive and really just about comprehension, getting the right answers. There are non-fiction texts in the guided reading programme...it's not very exciting though...no, not much excitement with those texts or tasks. I might have a think about making some links with non-fiction books in the library...put a bit of energy into it.

Nancy began by questioning herself on whether she had used non-fiction in her teaching, but could not recall doing so. Non-fiction, historically, has often been overlooked in the teaching of reading in primary schools, and reading for pleasure is most commonly associated with fiction (Alexander and Jarman, 2018). However, Nancy questioned herself on how she could include the use of non-fiction in her classroom, and found immediate solutions, linking topics to non-fiction, gathering up books in the classroom and how she could make better use of the school library. Nancy was thinking out loud and

beyond the task that was immediately in hand; she reflected and formulated an action plan for herself to address her perceived oversight.

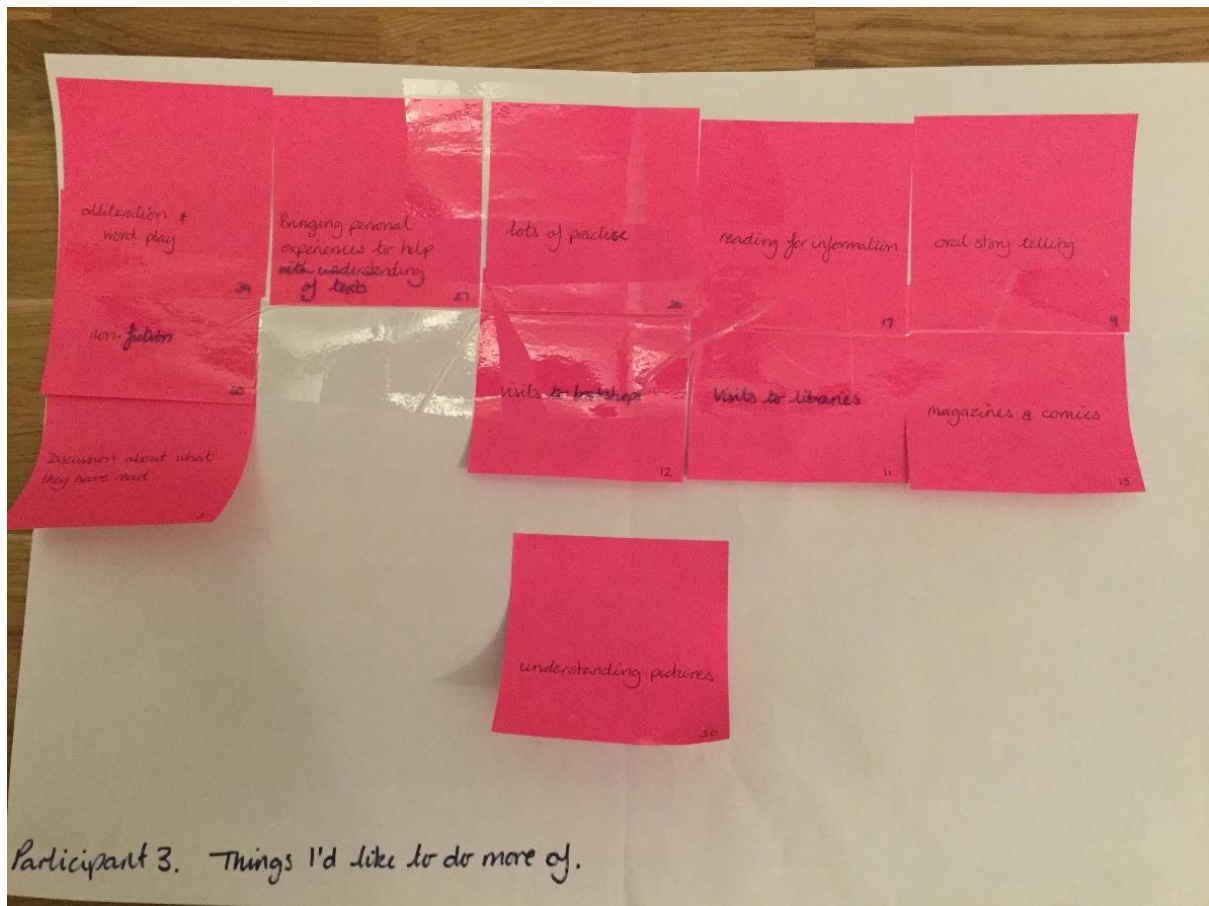


Figure 4-7 Nancy's concept map 1 – Things I'd like to do more of

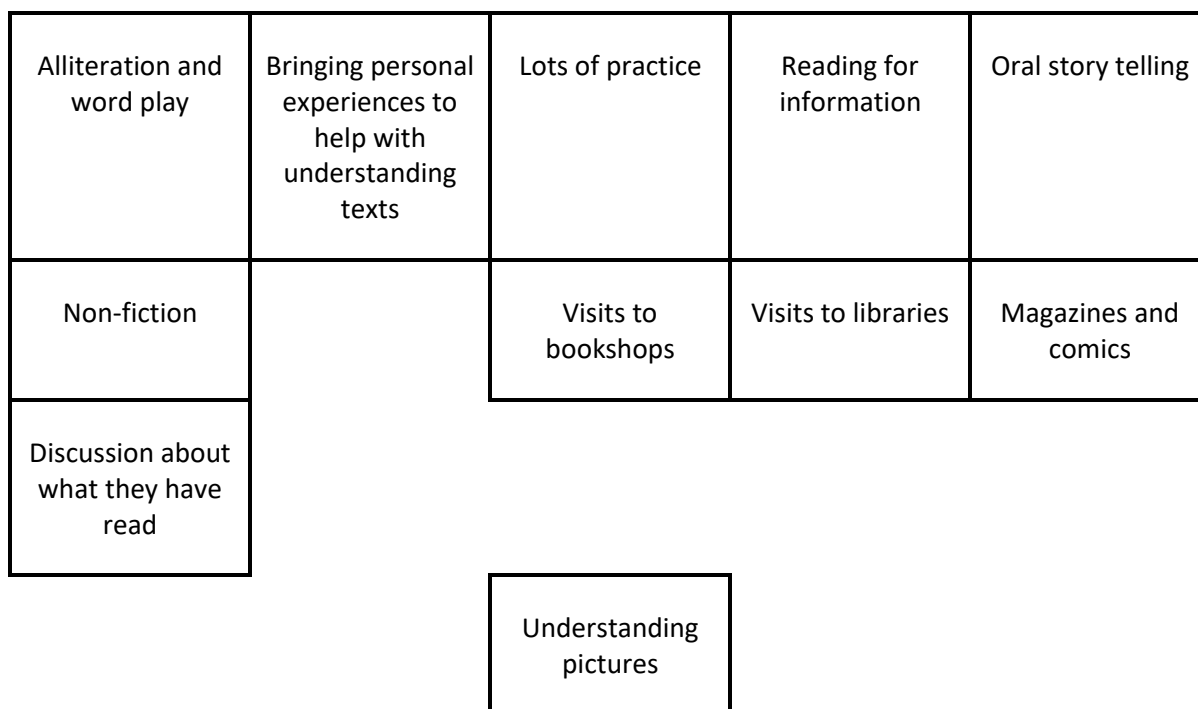


Figure 4-8 Reproduction of Nancy's concept map 1 (original not legible in Figure 4-7)

Nancy returned to the concept map she felt was a reflection of her current practice. She had included a wide variety of statements and had grouped them tightly together, saying that they are all important (see Figures 4-9 and 4-10):

Some of the things you don't have to teach they just spill out from what we are doing.

Nancy pointed to the statements 'enjoyment', 'exciting texts' and 'enjoying the sounds of words'.

Nancy went on to consider the statement 'quality time to read', saying:

I read to the children every day and make it fun when I can. It's not the same time every day either, just when the mood takes us for ten minutes or so. We have big discussions about what we have read, lots of questions, fun with the words too. Most of the children enjoy these sessions. There are a couple of children that I didn't manage to win around... that's a shame for them... I'm not sure what else I could do for them... it's something else I need to think about.

Nancy's view on talking about books agrees with the work of Chambers (1993), in that providing quality time to discuss books promotes the children's understandings of the multi-layered and emergent meanings in texts. There was a slight regret in Nancy's tone of voice as she considered how

she had not been able to 'win around' all the children to love reading and shared that it was something else to think about.

As she read the statement 'using toys to put stories into context', she said, 'This is interesting though':

I am going to add the word 'props' to this statement, because we've been using props and toys to help the children put stories into context. We started at the beginning of the year and it has really helped with their understanding. We've not always got what we need, but we try to make do. I watched a KS1 lesson with the use of props and I thought it would help the older kids with their understanding. I think it does, they seem to understand, especially the EAL children [English as an Additional Language].

Cremin (2007) argues that by teaching reading creatively, teachers will not only develop the children's reading skills but will develop the children into competent and enthusiastic readers.

Nancy shared how the experience of observing KS1 practitioners had influenced her teaching in KS2:

You know it's a shame, because I have a group of boys who go out for phonics, four of them, and they would love to use props, but they miss this part of the lesson every day. They do Freshstart¹⁰... it's a bit dry, comes at a cost though, equally they need to be able to access the texts so...you know...I'm not sure about this!

Nancy at this point questioned what she could do for the four boys in her class who were still receiving phonics instruction. She acknowledged that the boys would 'love to use props' but conformed to the school policy of prioritising the Freshstart programme for the boys. Wrigley (2017) argues that skilful teachers know how to combine techniques for encouraging children to read. Nancy had the skills but she did not appear to have the confidence to challenge school policy or implement her own ideas for encouraging the boys to engage with their reading.

Nancy created three maps that reflected her practice. On her third and final concept map she put together a group of statements which she labelled as 'not really relevant'. She did not give any

¹⁰ Freshstart is part of the RWi programme but is specifically designed for Key Stage 2 children who need to catch up.

further details and put the map to one side. The statements on the third map seem to be largely statements which she might have seen beyond her control as a classroom teacher (Figure 4-9 and Figure 4-10).

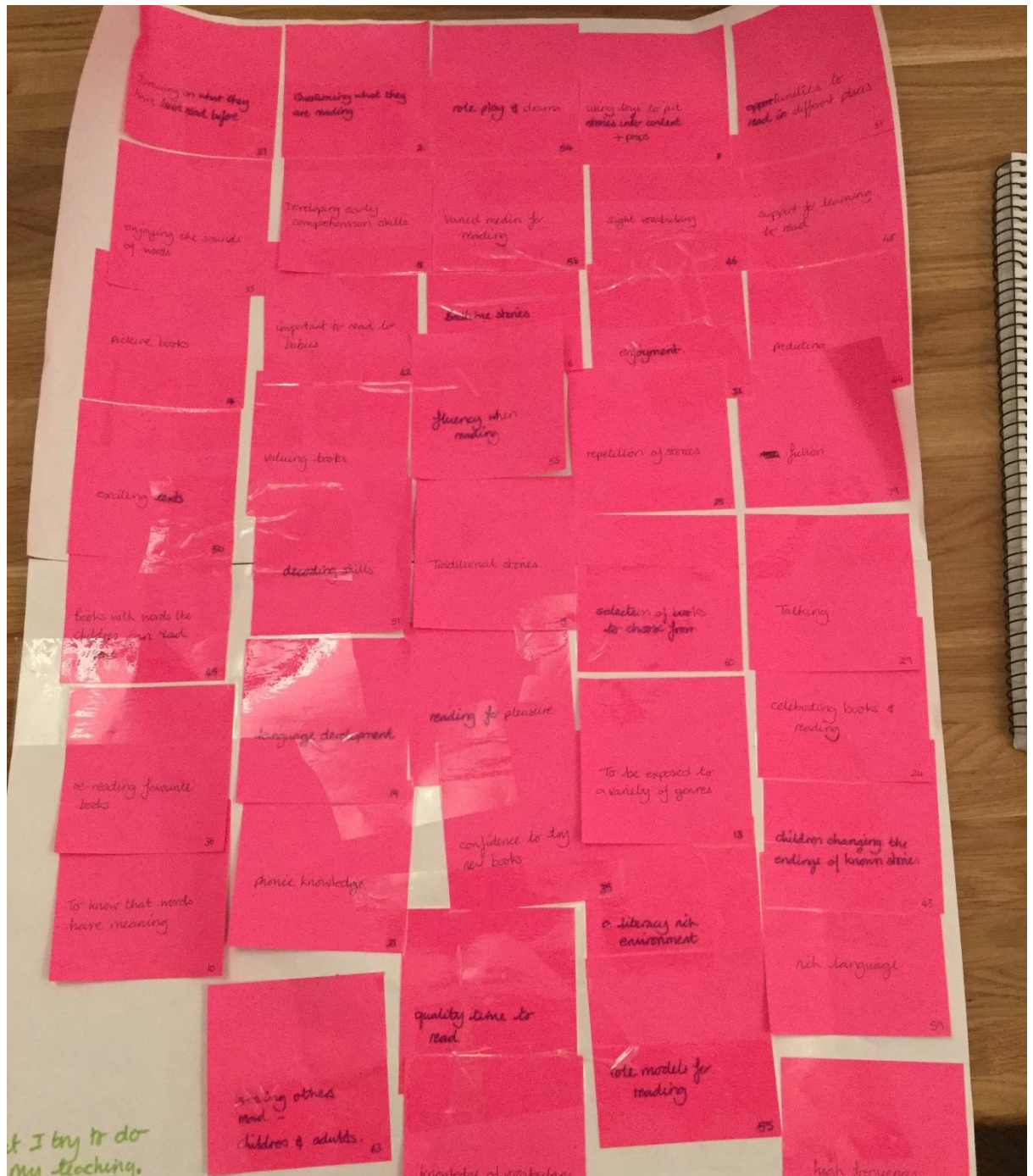


Figure 4-9 Nancy's concept map 2 – A reflection of Nancy's practice

Drawing on what they have read before	Questioning what they are reading	Role play and drama	Using toys to put stories into context	Opportunities to read in different places
Enjoying the sounds of words	Developing early comprehension skills	Varied media for reading	Sight vocabulary	Support for learning to read
Picture books	Important to read to babies	Bedtime stories	Enjoyment	Predicting
Exciting texts	Valuing books	Fluency when reading	Repetition of stories	Fiction
Books with words children can read alone	Decoding skills	Traditional stories	Selection of books to choose from	Talking
Re-reading favourite books	Language development	Reading for pleasure	To be exposed to a variety of genres	Celebrating books and reading
To know that words have meaning	Phonics knowledge	Confidence to try new books	A literacy rich environment	Children changing the endings of known stories
	Seeing others read both children and adults	Quality time to read	Role models for reading	
		Knowledge of vocabulary		High frequency words

Figure 4-10 Reproduction of Nancy's concept map 2 (original not legible in Figure 4-9)

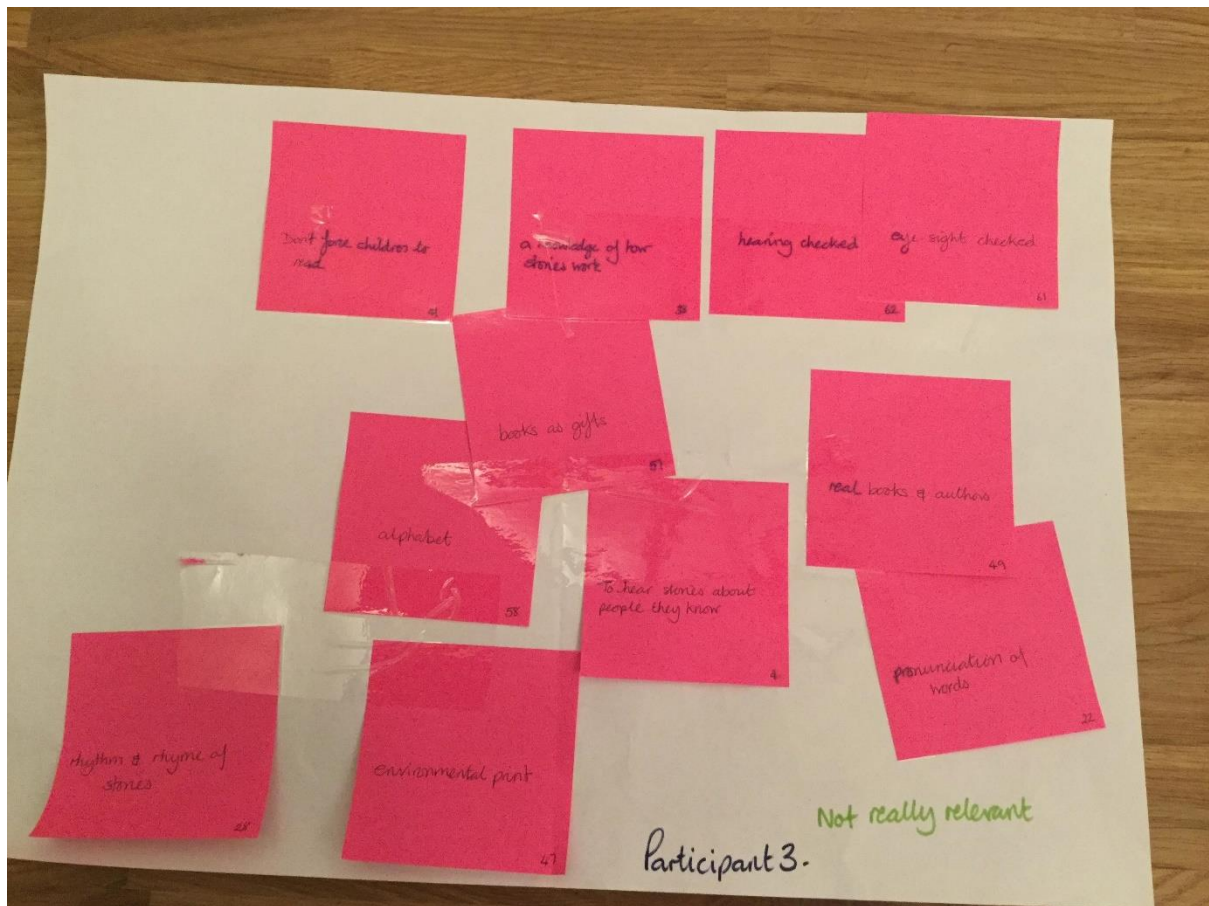


Figure 4-11 Nancy's concept map 3 – Not really relevant

	Don't force children to read	A knowledge of how stories work	Hearing checked	Eye sight checked
		Books as gifts		Real books and authors
		alphabet	To hear stories about people they know	Pronunciation of words
	Rhythm and rhyme of stories	Environmental print		

Figure 4-12 Reproduction of Nancy's concept map 3 (original not legible in Figure 4-11)

4.2.6 Reflection on Nancy

Nancy's theme of *the questioning self* and the sense of responsibility she had for her children's learning was captured in her reflective words: 'never considered', 'admittedly there are things here I don't do', 'I've not really thought about' and 'I need to think about how I might do that'. Although Nancy had been teaching for two years, there was a sense from her transcript that she was developing her teaching within the context of the interview. Schön (2017) suggests that enjoyment is a characteristic of a reflective practitioner and Nancy enjoyed the excitement of new discovery. She was responsive to moments of revelation, as she rethought her approach to parts of her teaching (Brookfield, 1995). There was a sense in Nancy's transcript that the statement task was prompting her to consider aspects of reading that she had not previously contemplated. For example, in a section where Nancy talked about engaging the children with spontaneous reading sessions that are fun, she recognised that, as Bearne and Reedy (2018) advocate, short focused activities can often engage unwilling learners. Taylor et al. (2003) note that reading to children, whatever their age, can be an essential strategy for supporting children's development with their reading. Reading aloud to children helps the children to associate reading with pleasure and provides a reading model (Wadsworth, 2008, cited in Cremin et al., 2014). However, Nancy acknowledged that not all the children enjoyed the sessions and declared that she is not sure what to do about this group of children. Not engaging all the children is widely recognised as an issue for classroom teachers, and studies have shown that lower attaining pupils hold more negative attitudes towards reading than do their higher attaining peers (Brooks, Schagen and Nastat, 1997; Ofsted, 2004; Sturman and Twist, 2004 and 2005; Twist et al., 2007). Nancy recognised swiftly that her practice was not sufficient for all the children, but as Schön (2017) states, her reflections, if used effectively and purposefully, will facilitate her ongoing personal and professional learning.

4.2.7 Ruby

Ruby was twenty-two when she qualified as a teacher nearly fourteen years prior to the data collection. During her career she has taught in several schools across a wide range of year groups. Ruby joined Appleberry three years ago as the Key Stage One leader and is currently teaching in Year 2. Ruby was leaving her present post to take up a Deputy Head position at a different school at the start of the new academic year. Throughout the interview, there was a confidence in Ruby which I had not observed in the other participants. She did not appear to be fazed by the task of completing the concept maps, and she was enthusiastic about talking about reading. 'I love reading...for my own pleasure but to the kids too'.

Smith et al. (2009) suggest developing emergent themes may involve returning to the participant's entire transcript rather than just a focus on discrete extracts. Many themes emerged in Ruby's voice, as they had in other participants' transcripts, but the revisiting of the whole transcript led to the emergent theme of how Ruby *considered* her teaching of reading. The word 'consider' appears repeatedly in the transcript. However, the emergent theme *considered* was chosen on the basis that Ruby appeared to be careful with how she thought about aspects of teaching reading and that each of her responses presented as being well thought through.

Smith et al. (2009) welcome the use of non-directive interviews in an IPA study and acknowledge that the way each interview unfolds depends entirely on how the participant responds. Ruby's interview was by far the shortest, lasting just under twenty minutes. At the beginning of the non-directive interview with Ruby, the audio recording registers a distinct silence for the best part of ten minutes. All that can be heard is the sound of Post-it notes being sorted. Her approach was different from that of the other participants, all of whom had started with a conversation. Ruby, however, remained silent as she considered each of the statements from the statement set in turn. She then began to put them into two groups. She revisited each of the statements and filtered some of the statements across to the other pile with a small third pile of statements starting to emerge.

Right, I think I'm ready now to talk this through, I just wanted to make sure I had considered all of the statements. Some of them I think I will have to explain how I have interpreted them.

She began with the statement 'seeing others reading, children and adults'. She said:

Reading, it's easy to forget how important it is and how we can get it so wrong... think this is so important if you consider what it means. It means this is something that is achievable and that you can do it too, you can learn to read. That self-belief in children is so important for children to learn to read and something which can be overlooked. I've put the statement right in the centre of the map, as I think together with early experiences of reading can sow the seed of successful reading journey [sic]. Sometimes we have the expectation that we can teach reading without considering what the child thinks about the task in front of them.

Ruby approached each of the statements with a much broader understanding than just the surface meaning of the words. She considered the meaning behind the words in the context of learning to read, what this means in practice, and why it is important for learning to read. Ruby read the next statement she had selected as being important for learning to read, 'bringing personal experiences to help with the understanding of texts'. In confirmation of this Ruby explained:

This is really important too... Children need to make early connections with books, Ok, for example, oh...I don't know...if they haven't had a life experience of going to a shopping mall then the Biff and Chip¹¹ book about going up and down the escalators is not going to be funny to them...or interesting... You can teach understanding, of course you can, but the immediacy of their enjoyment and understanding is just not there...it also removes the pleasure from reading too.

Ruby considered the impact personal experience can have on the understanding of texts for children. The example she chose perhaps revealed her personal experience of teaching using a text and the response the children had at the time. The response, however, revealed how Ruby considers the impact the tiniest of details can have on children's reading experience.

Ruby then began to talk more generally about teaching reading, as the next extract was not a response to any particular statement from the statement set.

Teaching Year 2 can be quite tricky, as most of the children come into the class able to read the text – but a large proportion of them don't understand what they

¹¹ Biff and Chip is a reading scheme book from The Oxford Reading Tree, and published by Oxford University Press.

are reading. Which is a shame, but...also difficult for us as Year two teachers, as we are assessed on how the children understand what they read. That's why I have made a large group on the sheet (concept map) which includes everything I do on a daily basis for teaching reading, and I always have regardless of year group. This doesn't always sit well with what the school expects...but it's the way I do it... It makes sense to me. I struggle with filtering off bits of teaching reading. This is the way I teach reading but it's not the way I am asked to teach reading. I am asked, or rather, Reception and Year 1 are asked to focus on just phonics and high frequency words first, before considering understanding and meaning-making, the reason for reading.

Ruby turned her focus to the concept maps and explained that she could have included all the statements on one map – 'that's what took me a long time to decide'. Ruby suggested that many of the statements sit alongside the teaching of reading. Ruby created three concept maps. Ruby's concept map structures were different from the other participants in that she chose to create her second map around the edge of the first map (Figure 4-13 and Figure 4-14). Ruby explained her thinking in the extract below:

I have created the second group in a type of arch/circle type thing around the edge of my core practice, as I know this is all happening but some of them are as a result of what we have been learning in a different context. This, for example: 'exciting texts' are great, but what is an exciting text? Is it something that starts out with the intention of being exciting, or is it exciting because we understand what we are reading, or because we have had a discussion about it and lots of questions have emerged which make it exciting? I think it is one of the many statements which are as a result of having the reading skills to read and understand a book.

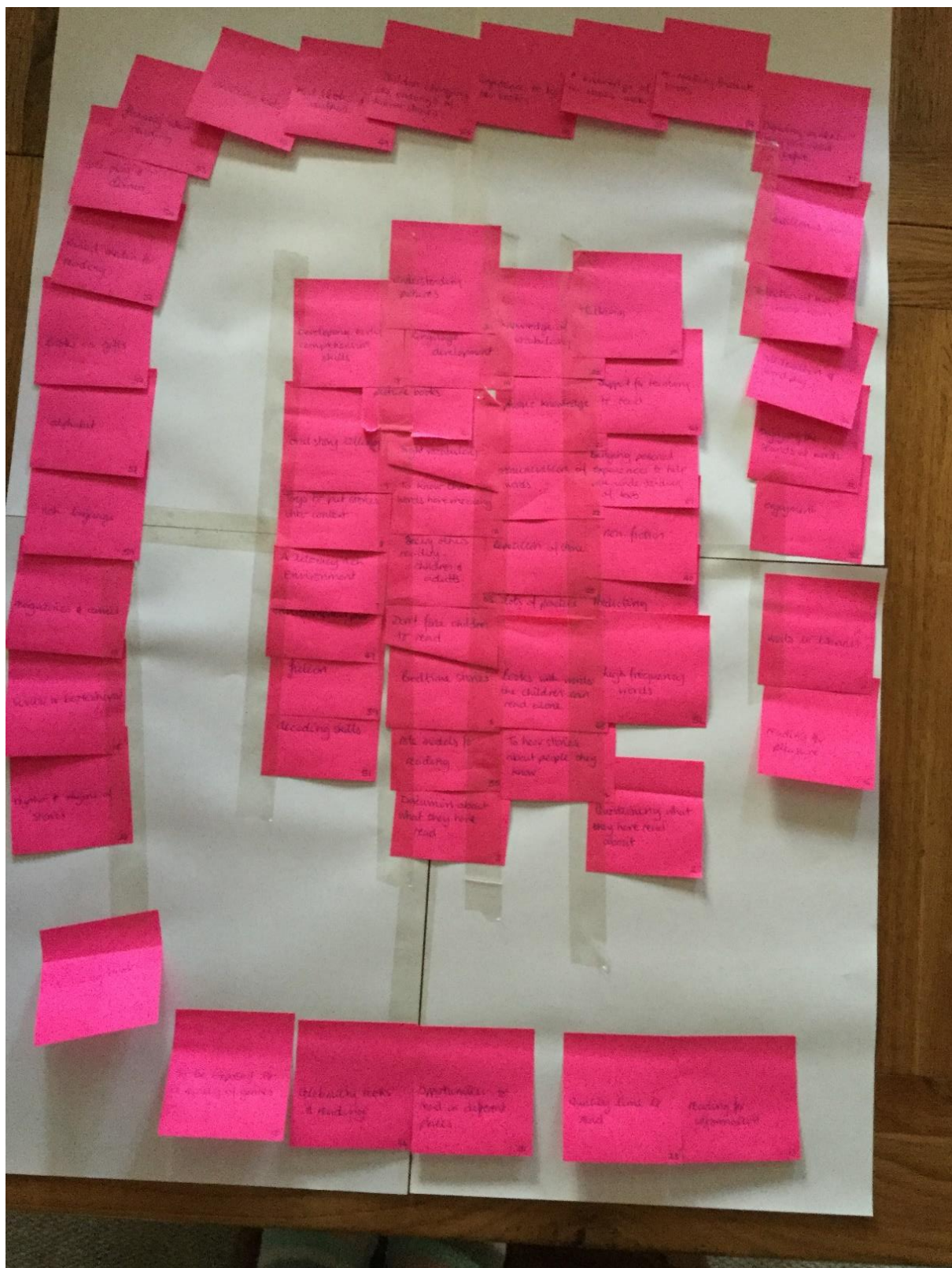


Figure 4-13 Ruby's concept map 1 – Core practice



Figure 4-14 Reproduction of Ruby's concept map 1 (original not legible in Figure 4-13)

Ruby's third and final concept map consists of just three statements (Figure 4-15): 'eye-sight checks', 'hearing checks' and 'important to read to babies'. She explained why she grouped them separately:

This tiny group is not really relevant for just reading and to some extent they are not in my full control. Obviously I would speak to parents about sight and eye checks [sic] if I had noticed something in class, beyond that, it is out of my control – perhaps mention it to the family liaison officer if nothing is done. 'Important to read to babies', I agree is important for learning to read, but not something I can alter when you teach six year olds.

Ruby closed her non-directive interview by reflecting:

When you see all these statements together, it makes you realise how fragmented we now think of reading, rather than a holistic activity [sic]. I am not sure how we've got here, but it features in all of our staff meetings and all the conversations we have as a phase group. It's difficult to resolve, as we are under such pressure to perform all the time and that can give you a very different focus.

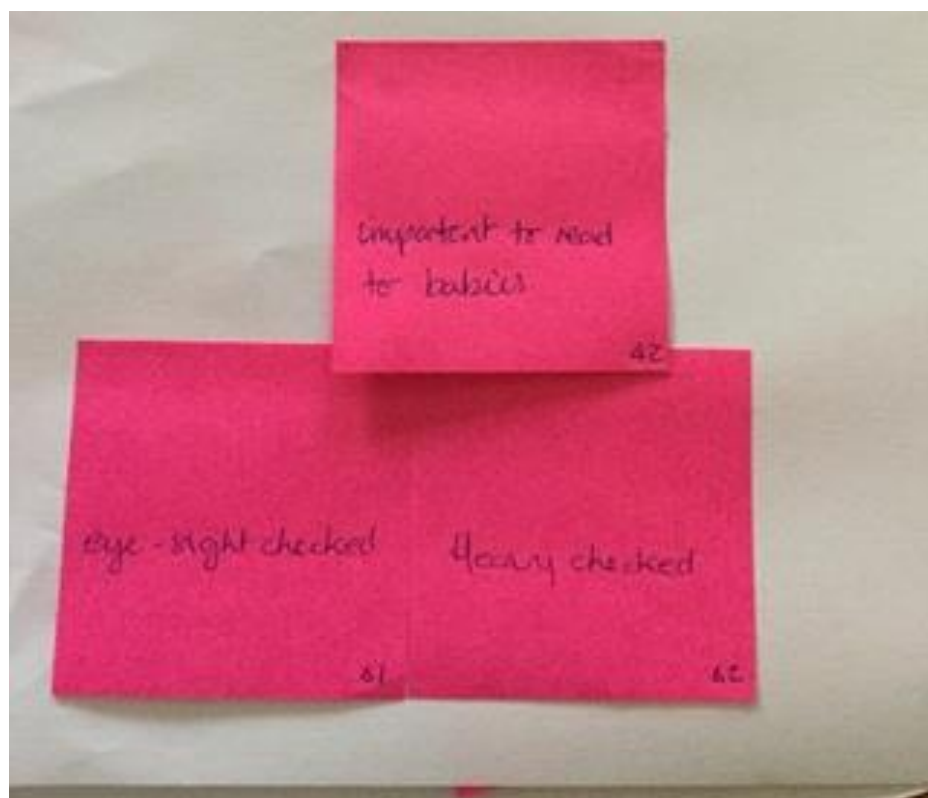


Figure 4-15 Ruby's concept map 2 – Out of my control

4.2.8 Reflection on Ruby

Ruby does not refer directly to policy, yet her approach to teaching is far from the current political discourse on teaching reading using the Simple View of Reading (SVR). As Bearne and Reedy (2018) remind us, the political and media focus around the teaching of reading tends to zoom in on the results of skills tests and Ofsted gradings, which are generally based on just quantitative data. Although the National Curriculum acknowledges elements of reading for pleasure, they are not as prominent as the technical skills (ibid.). In contrast to the political agenda, Ruby appears to have shaped her teaching of reading around her concerns that reading should in the first instance be accessible to the child both in their experiences and self-belief. Ruby's approach to teaching reading differs from the formulaic approach advocated by the National Curriculum and from the template of the scheme chosen by the school, in that her approach puts the child at the centre of her teaching. For Ruby, this is a considered approach based on her experience. It is also an approach that seems to chime with Cremin et al.'s (2014) idea that reading is a multi-layered process that recognises the interplay between children's capacity to read and their desire to read. Notably, Ruby's approach to teaching reading (which she characterises as 'it is not what I am asked to do') appears not to be a rejection of the school's practice, but an openness that her practice may not follow the prescription of the schemes. Ruby's concept map (Figure 4-13 and Figure 4-14) revealed how she considered all aspects, including phonics, in the teaching of reading, but she struggled with separating out the skills in the way national and to some extent school policy dictates. Ruby reveals a much more deeply considered understanding that seems to extend considerably wider than the requirements for national assessment. Ruby is confident with her teaching of reading and has been successful in her career, as she attested:

My data is always good, but it wouldn't be if I just stuck to the guidance. I try to do so much more to foster the children's love of reading.

Ruby's thinking chimes with the work of Clark and De Zoysa (2011) in that she recognises that attitudes and behaviour are directly and independently related to reading attainment. Perhaps one of

the most notable differences between Ruby's approach and that of current political policy is that Ruby was mindful that enjoyment is an essential aspect of engagement and motivation to learn to read (Cremin et al., 2014).

4.3 Master Theme – Enjoyment

In the final section of this chapter, I turn to what has emerged as a master theme. Smith et al. (2009) suggest that there will be many thematic connections across the participants' transcripts, but some themes will be more potent than others. The master theme *enjoyment* emerged in all the teachers' transcripts, evidenced by their desire to promote reading as an activity which is pleasurable. The word 'enjoyment' was not directly referred to by the participants, but phrasing in their general responses and attitudes indicated the importance the teachers placed on the children's enjoyment, in that all the teachers wanted to ensure the children enjoyed learning to read.

The participants' responses implied that they adjusted and tailored their classroom provision to engage the children with reading. The responses also suggested that the teachers recognised that, as Goswami notes (2008), teaching reading is not a one-size-fits-all process, and involves more than the accrual of disjointed skills and knowledge. The SVR, a model that Rose (2006) admitted separated out decoding and understanding, presented problems for the participants as they viewed reading as an enjoyable holistic activity. There were similarities between the teachers in how they referred to the best interests of the children and placed the children's enjoyment central to their teaching. Nancy, Flo, Emily and Ruby were candid in their admission that owing to government policy and requirements there were pressures from the school to perform, and that attainment was a priority. However, through their practice, Flo, Emily, Ruby and Nancy were meeting the demands of policy and balancing their own understandings, by establishing links and filling the gaps left behind by following phonics programmes and formal instruction. During the interviews, all of the teachers prioritised personal experiences, engagement, and pleasure for the children in learning to read, which evidenced the theme of *enjoyment*. As the teachers shared their understandings and practice, there was a sense

that teachers in this study saw the school expectations and policy as only part of their classroom provision, and that as teachers they needed to bring coherence to the perceived fragmented approach for teaching reading which policy brought about. All the teachers acknowledged that promoting enjoyment in reading was a priority for them, yet to achieve the promotion of enjoyment the teachers had to bridge the gaps between policy and their professional knowledge and preferences. Emily, Flo, Nancy and Ruby all referred to 'squeezing in time' and 'not sticking to the guidance', as they shared how they made sense of policy and practice in their classroom.

Emily valued the shared experience for the children and said, 'I like to start the day with a story, it sets the tone for the day and gives a shared experience we can all talk about'. What we know from Emily is that despite the school's approach, and the emphasis on systematic synthetic phonics, she had not overlooked the many and wider potential routes to reading (Bowtell, Holding and Bearne, 2014). Emily placed the child's interest and enjoyment central to her teaching day. Flo did something similar, encouraging the children to dress up to help them understand stories, aligning with Comber's (2003) view that children are more likely to enjoy reading if they are encouraged to play an active role in learning to read. The practice discussed by both Emily and Flo chimes with Lockwood (2012) in that the child needs to be absorbed in their reading activity to engage and be successful with their reading. Nancy too recognised the value of engagement and pleasure, asserting, 'I read to the children every day and make it fun when I can'.

Although the participants' teaching experiences were different in terms of time teaching and year groups taught, there were commonalities between their approaches to teaching reading in that they viewed reading for pleasure as interrelated with engagement, motivation, fulfilment and purpose, all of which, Bearne and Reedy (2018) note, underpin the pleasure and satisfaction in reading. All of the teachers perceived their role as encouraging the children to become a reader and fostering enjoyment in reading as part of the daily teaching routine. There was a sense that the teachers were teaching what was necessary to comply with the policy and to meet short-term

attainment targets. However, they were undertaking so much more. The teachers, on their own initiative, were finding and prioritising ways to develop engagement and enjoyment for children learning to read by drawing the complicated process of learning to read together through their own creativity. There was within all the transcripts an overriding emphasis on enjoyment and the lifelong rewards reading brings through the approach the teachers take to try to instil the value of reading in the pupils. This is evidenced in the following:

I try to make the environment literacy rich, and squeeze in where possible, role play, oral storytelling, talking about story endings and changing them, that sort of thing (Emily).

I like to encourage them with dressing up and understanding the stories we have read through role play. Previously this would have been all linked together in the main lesson, but we have structures to follow now (Flo).

I read to the children every day and make it fun when I can, it's not the same time every day either, just when the mood takes us for ten minutes or so. We have big discussions about what we have read, lots of questions, fun with the words too (Nancy).

In the concept maps constructed by the teachers it was noticeable that there was a separating out of their teaching provision between decoding and understanding. Interestingly, as each of the teachers tried to make sense of their practice, each talked about the teaching of reading as a balance between meeting targets and what the children need to view reading as a pleasurable and coherent activity. The teachers' professional integrity for nurturing children's enjoyment in reading seems to go beyond policy. There was a sense of responsibility, and that the teachers appeared to fill the gaps left behind by initiatives, schemes and policy. Evidence accrued from the transcripts suggest that the teachers not only bridge the gaps left behind by policy but use their professional knowledge and understanding of teaching reading to provide a much richer and wider reading experience. The teachers seemed to go beyond the expectations of policy and had professional integrity to ensure the children find reading enjoyable. The teachers, in my study, all recognised that intrinsic motivation was important for learning to read and understood that motivation can be developed through pupils' engagement and enjoyment, something they felt was overlooked as a priority by the school.

4.4 Summary

All of the teachers recognised that teaching reading as a holistic activity in school presented many challenges, as policy, both in school and nationally, insists on the discrete teaching of reading skills and knowledge. Larson and Marsh's (2015) view is that the use of such an approach contributes to a reductionist framework, often present in schools, with less importance placed on how literacy is constructed in everyday practices (Hall, 2003). There were similarities in the approaches adopted by the teachers interviewed for this study, in that all four teachers had a strong grasp of how reading was represented within national and school policy and curriculum, and there was also a mismatch between their expectations and experiences of literacy, which sought to recognise historical, cultural, social and political influences. Ruby recognised the importance of children's wider community experiences and attempted to bring these into the classroom to open up new ways of thinking for the children (Larson and Marsh, 2015). Emily also recognised the literacy value of building a small community around sharing a book in order to have a shared experience to discuss. However, there are striking differences between the teachers' understandings of literacy and much broader multidisciplinary perspectives on literacy frameworks. For example, Larson and Marsh (2015) describe literacy as socially situated and they expand the concept of learning to read much wider than experiences in the classroom to include all the children's social, cultural and historical interactions and influences to expand their understandings. The teachers' understandings in this present study, however, were focused more on what the teachers had to teach than on considering critical insights drawn from much broader literacy practices (Browne, 2003; Comber et al., 2007).

Notably absent from the teachers' commentary was the question of the relevance of the literacy curriculum for the world in which the children were growing up (Beavis, 2014). The participants discussed at length the importance of the traditional print curriculum, but appeared not to recognise the diverse and multiple forms of digital and multimodal literacy as a contemporary component of learning to read. The relevance of digital literacies was seemingly overlooked, with no reference to the changing nature of literacy from the historical function of books towards screens and

interactivity (Burnett et al., 2014; Kress, 2010). Consideration for how such media could enhance and deepen the curriculum for the children was not discussed by the teachers (Beavis, 2014; Merchant, 2014). Although all teachers expressed the desire to include play and valued talk to improve literacy in the classroom, they tended not to look too far beyond the reductionist framework of the National Curriculum. They looked for ways to bring coherence to the curriculum by drawing on traditional aspects of teaching reading, but the possibility of integrating new technologies into existing social practices was not explored (Merchant, 2014). In this oversight, arguably, the teachers appeared not to consider the complexities of literacy in the twenty-first century (Larson and Marsh, 2015) and had not recognised the increasing importance of new technologies. Of course, it could be argued that the statement set, used as a prompt for the participants during the interviews, did not contain any reference to digital literacies and possibly contributed to the lack of reference to this in the transcripts. Significantly, however, new technologies were not raised during the lengthy discussions held by the whole school staff as an aspect of importance for children's literacy, and the teachers in the interviews were contributors to those discussions.

5 Discussion

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I place a focus on capturing the teachers' voices. To reveal the teachers' understandings at a deeper level, I used Baxter-Magolda's knowledge continuum (2004) as a tool for analysis. I look at each of the phases on the continuum in turn and draw examples of the types of knowing from the teachers' transcripts. In the final section, I analyse the effectiveness of the continuum and how the hierarchical structure of the continuum presented complications, given that the teachers demonstrated many phases of knowing in their understandings.

Richardson (1997) asserts from a social constructivist perspective that individuals create their understandings based on interactions between what they already know, interactions with others and with the presentation of potential new ideas. To analyse what the teachers already believed about the teaching of reading and those understandings which were formed by considering alternative views and perspectives, I applied a theoretical framework to my analysis. Smith et al. (2009) acknowledge that to guide data analysis to a deeper level, the use of a theoretical framework is helpful. I used Baxter-Magolda's (2004) Knowledge Continuum and her four phases of knowing to form themes for my analysis. Baxter-Magolda's phases of knowing (*absolute*, *transitional*, *independent* and *contextual* knowing) were chosen not as a judgement or grading tool but to be illustrative of the participants' broad understandings. The phases of knowing were used to be illustrative of how the participants construct and make sense of their practice, moving between the phases of knowing to demonstrate their understandings. Uncovering understandings and perspectives of teachers' practice was never going to be accomplished easily. Therefore, flexibility in the analysis was necessary to draw out the teachers' understandings in ways that reflected and captured the teachers' existing and developing perspectives (Smith et al., 2009).

The phases on Baxter-Magolda's continuum, although interrelated, have discrete and distinctive criteria from one another. The absolute position denotes an uncritical acceptance of expert

knowledge, while the transitional position indicates that the participant is beginning to adopt a more critical perspective in relation to their understandings. Independent knowing is characterised by the level of confidence displayed by a participant and how they challenge assumptions. Contextual knowing is applicable to an autonomous agent thinking through problems and integrating and applying knowledge in context. An example of how I used the table for my analysis can be found in Appendix 9.

In my analysis of the data, I considered each comment systematically in turn, assigning each to one of the various positions on the continuum. For the analysis, I chose comments that I felt typified the various positions on the continuum, as each teacher throughout their discussion demonstrated many aspects from each of the knowing phases, and at times the teachers bridged various phases while they reflected on the same point. By applying a social constructivist theoretical lens, the following sections look at examples from each of the phases interspersed with a critical commentary drawn from the academic and political discourse on the teaching of reading.

After careful scrutiny of the transcripts and concept maps, I found no examples of absolute knowing to share in this study. This was not unexpected. Baxter-Magolda's (1996) epistemological study of the development of graduates revealed that by the time students leave university, the majority are moving away from an absolute position. Baxter-Magolda found that students were beginning to have a more critical perspective and accepted that some knowledge was uncertain. In my study, Baxter-Magolda's continuum was used with experienced teachers who demonstrated that they were able to apply their knowledge and make connections with what they knew moving them away from the absolute knowing position on the continuum (Baxter-Magolda, 2004). Across all the transcripts there was a sense that the teachers had moved away from the use of expert knowledge, typical of the absolute phase, and were using their own understandings to make sense of their practice.

In the next section, I discuss the phase transitional knowing. The extracts chosen were not the only examples of transitional knowing in the participants' transcripts, but I felt the extracts were illustrative of the teachers beginning to form their understandings and taking a critical perspective of their teaching.

5.2 Transitional Knowing

The following comments typified the transitional phase on the continuum, where the teachers demonstrated a familiarity with the complex processes of teaching reading. In the extracts, the teachers revealed how they were questioning practice rather than demonstrating characteristics more in line with the absolute position of accepting that there is only one correct approach to teaching reading. These extracts go beyond teachers merely accepting information at face value. Rather, the teachers were exploring differing perspectives, including whether their own views or those of others could be challenged. The comments included in the section below are illustrative of transitional knowing and are selected from Nancy and Flo's transcripts. The extracts reveal a developing understanding, as the teachers' transition from absolute to transitional knowing on the continuum moving away from the acceptance of formal knowledge.

5.2.1 Nancy's Transitional Knowing

The first example of transitional knowing was taken from the interview with Nancy (for the full extract see Chapter 4, Section 4.2.5). Nancy reviewed the pre-generated statement set, and read each statement in turn. The statement that prompted the following response was 'bringing personal experiences to help with the understanding of text'. Nancy's response was:

Gosh!...this is a massive oversight on my part, I've never considered drawing on the children's personal experience.

Using the knowledge statements collaboratively generated by the school, Nancy explored her perspective of drawing on children's personal experience and how it currently looks in her practice. Furlong and Maynard (1995) argue that in the busyness of the school day, teachers do not on a day-

to-day basis give conscious thought to the relationship between their teaching and new ideas. However, Nancy's response was more in line with the understanding of Medwell et al. (1998) that teachers are questioning individuals who learn through reflection. In other words, teachers are autonomous agents with the ability to prioritise and develop their own practice through self-evaluation and reflexivity (Dewey, 1929). Here, Nancy was giving conscious thought to her teaching and gaining a deeper understanding of teaching reading (Cliff-Hodges, 2016). Although this particular statement may not have been considered by Nancy before, the reflective approach she took was not a new way of working. Her reflective process was instinctive and appeared habitual, and Nancy thought seriously about her learning and practice (Brookfield, 1995). The statement prompted a new perspective for Nancy, which drew on her current understanding of how children might need to draw on their personal experiences. She developed her understanding further by considering how to develop children's experiences into her practice. There was a recognition by Nancy that drawing on the children's experiences was something she had previously overlooked in her practice. Nancy recognised that valuing children's personal experiences was not to be disregarded in teaching reading (Roche, 2015).

Nancy's willingness to accept the statement 'bringing personal experiences to help with the understanding of text', and many other examples in her transcript, may have come from the knowledge that the statements had been socially constructed with her peers (Appendix 7) and were therefore representative of a wider school knowledge. Nancy draws on the knowledge generated by her colleagues to create her own individual understandings. Individual understandings, notes Richardson (1997), are formed when someone takes a new idea with which they have been presented and uses this to build on what they already know. Nancy began to recognise that drawing on children's experience was not too far from her existing understanding. She recognised the potential for helping children with the comprehension of the text, and as Roche (2015) suggests, the opportunity to stretch children's understandings to find common ground and engagement with the text. Nancy makes what McVicker-Clinchy (1989) calls a subjective judgement based on feelings, that

an idea is right if it feels right. What is striking is that Nancy's response clearly demonstrates transitional knowing, as she used a reflective process for her professional development to form new understandings, a process Schön (1996) refers to as 'reflection-in-practice'. The interesting point for this discussion is why Nancy makes this transition at this moment. Arguably the concept of drawing on children's personal experiences was not too far from her understanding of drawing on her own experiences, and Nancy immediately recognised that drawing on the children's experiences was something to be valued and included within her practice. A shift in Nancy's thinking is apparent in her transcript. Arguably, she was at a point in her professional development where she could draw from her experience as a teacher to reflect and develop her thinking to influence her future practice. Additionally, the statement set she was using as a prompt for her discussion comprised information gathered from experienced colleagues, and it appeared that Nancy used the opportunity to interact with the knowledge to develop her practice. Nancy was not instructed in a formal way to develop her practice, but in that moment she chose to make an interaction between her understandings and the stimulus of the statement set (Baxter-Magolda, 2004).

5.2.2 Flo's Transitional Knowing

The next extract was taken from Flo's transcript, where she responded to the statement 'phonic knowledge' (Appendix 7), and she too uses transitional knowing to challenge her understandings (for the full extract see Chapter 4, Section 4.2.3). However, Flo's transitional knowing differed from Nancy's. Whereas Nancy was considering a new idea and how this would look in her practice, Flo begins with a familiar concept, one very much part of her practice. In the extract below Flo talked confidently about the effectiveness of RWi. She acknowledged that she was at first sceptical about the RWi approach, but could not argue with the result that her pupils were all reading.

When I first got here I was sceptical about RWi, it was not what I was used to. I completed the training, and yes, the Foundation Stage children make clear progress with it, they are all reading (Flo).

Interestingly, in the next extract, Flo began to reform her understanding of reading, based on what Richardson (1997) suggests is an interaction between prior meaning and new understandings. Through her discussion she reveals older understandings, which appear to have been rekindled, as she begins to refer to her previous practice. In this reflective extract, Flo begins to adopt a more critical perspective as she continues to explore what phonic knowledge is and how this links to reading. The excerpt captures how she visibly alters her thinking around what phonic knowledge contributes to learning to read. Here her response altered from a confidence in her understanding to adopting a more critical perspective.

Actually thinking about it – there is something not quite right with it [RWi], it seems to remove them from all other aspects of reading... They miss out on listening to stories, gazing at pictures, and talking about stories (Flo).

It is not quite clear from the statement whether Flo was questioning RWi or whether she was questioning her conceptualisation of reading. She began, as Baxter-Magolda (2004) suggests, to reflect and re-evaluate her understanding of teaching reading using a fresh perspective, and she draws on previous experience to challenge and construct new understandings. For Flo, the concept of learning to read is now much broader than making clear progress on a scale. She recognised that a balance of other elements, as she detailed above, could contribute to learning to read. Flo has now shifted her focus from how successful the children have been with their phonics, which represents a shift from her comfort zone, as referred to by Baxter-Magolda (2004). Flo began to consider the content of the lessons and how the lessons may fall short in their provision. She challenges her certainty of the previous accolades of the RWi approach. What was interesting about the transitional knowing phase with Flo, was that she had previously challenged her thinking on the effectiveness of RWi and integrated that knowledge into her practice, which was more in line with that of a contextual knower. However, the opportunity to discuss and reflect on her practice did not confirm her thinking. She revisited a more critical perspective and began to form her own new understandings. Through her reflection on her practice, she began to develop her own ideas rather than relying on expert knowledge, as would be characteristic of the absolute knowing segment of the continuum. Once

more the statement was a prompt for her discussion. It was interesting again that the simple statement seemed to have sown a seed for her challenging herself about the practice she was previously accepting of. Through an opportunity to consider her current practice and understanding, Flo adopted a more critical perspective and constructed a self-evaluation. Again, this was not formal continuous professional development (CPD) but an opportunity nevertheless to engage, reflect and make sense of her current practice.

5.2.3 Summary on Transitional Knowing

Neither Nancy nor Flo elaborated or provided commentary on all of the statements; in fact, some were merely glossed over and added to a concept map without any reference. It was difficult to say why some statements warranted more attention than others. It could be argued that some of the statements from the statement set (Appendix 7) were more established in the teachers' understandings and did not require an explanation. The statements were simply placed on the concept maps. Some, however, were given greater scrutiny; conceivably the criteria for a particular new aspect of knowledge were not too far from their existing understandings or had relevance with their own experience. Beck and Kosnik (2006) suggest that teachers cannot grasp new ideas without linking them to existing concepts. Here Beck and Kosnik build on Dewey's (1916) idea that we must interpret new ideas in the context of their present interest and understanding. For example, considering again the statement 'bringing personal experiences to help with the understanding of text', this was a concept that Nancy was able to link directly with her previous experience, and she used this as a basis to reach a novel insight (Beck and Kosnik, 2006). Nancy's new insight and understanding for teaching reading could potentially modify her practice, but this will be, as Beck and Kosnik, and also Poulson (2001), suggest, a gradual process.

The extract used to illustrate Flo's transitional knowing with the statement 'phonic knowledge' began not by drawing on the understandings held by more experienced colleagues but by questioning understandings based on her previous experience. There appeared to be a transitional phase for Flo,

as the confidence she had about the children all reading began to wane. Flo started to explore different interpretations of what it is to know how to read, and what is required for children to be accomplished readers. In subsequent extracts (see Flo's shared experiences, Chapter 4, Section 4.2.3) Flo talks about her balanced approach of teaching reading. As Baxter-Magolda acknowledges, the reflective process is likely to change participants' thinking. This was indicated in Flo's understanding of reading. Throughout Flo's thought process and discussion on her practice, there was an increasing development of her understanding that more than just phonics is required to teach the children how to read. Subsequent extracts from Flo's transcripts appeared to align with the recent work of Goodman, Fries and Strauss (2016) in that learning to read is a complex process, and to become accomplished in reading involves children having a much wider knowledge of semantics drawn from their knowledge of pictures, context and personal experiences (Bearne and Reedy, 2018).

The transitional phase, in the examples provided above, looked very different as a theme for Flo's and Nancy's understandings. Two distinct patterns emerged here in relation to the transitional phase. First, there was an attempt to connect more deeply with the subject of teaching reading. Second, there was a willingness to explore new ideas. Nancy, for example, used transitional knowing to develop her understanding in areas she had not previously considered. The statement set, the socially constructed knowledge from the whole school event, was a stimulus for Nancy to restructure her concept of teaching reading (Richardson, 1997). The analysis of Flo's extracts revealed a sense that she was continually in a critical process on her teaching of reading (Bereiter, 1994; Brookfield, 1995). Flo sought to make sense of her practice and conflicting understandings through a reflective and cyclic process. Flo reflected on being sceptical about RWi when she was first introduced to the scheme, which suggested that she had thought critically about this before, but the RWi training and the impact of the programme may have influenced her current thinking. However, reconsidering RWi again she reflected on her understandings of what learning to read actually entails and how this might be at odds with the formal understanding of using the RWi approach.

5.3 Independent Knowing

The following comments typified the independent phase on the continuum, where teachers' understandings were more confident about the complex processes of teaching reading, and where the teachers were challenging not only their assumptions but approaches adopted by the government and the school. The independent phase, taken from Baxter-Magolda's continuum, was visible when the teachers revealed greater confidence to think for themselves and were creating their own understandings on the teaching of reading. McVicker-Clinchy (1989) refers to these teachers as subjective knowers, as they are able to look towards their understandings to make sense of existing and new knowledge. Extracts selected for the phase of independent knowing are illustrative of how the participants were expressing stronger confidence in challenging assumptions and asking searching questions. In the 'independent knowing' phase participants reassessed their knowledge and began to assert their voice in their practice. Each extract revealed how the teachers demonstrated an understanding and confidence to think for themselves and challenge assumptions made about the teaching of reading. Extracts included have been taken from Emily's transcripts to provide evidence to illustrate the independent phase of knowing, although examples of independent knowing were seen in all the participants' transcripts.

5.3.1 Emily's Independent Knowing

When we began the interview and before she started to sort the statements for her concept map, Emily said:

You know we do RWi here, it takes up a lot of time. It's not what I would do, but the school expect it. I think it is a waste of time...the problem is that, almost all the children start school unable to read and very few have interacted with books... We are up against it from the start, I have to find time to get them interested in reading. RWi doesn't get them interested in reading; it doesn't get them reading either.

Emily was confident in establishing her position on the teaching of SSP and to openly discuss her disagreement with the approach taken by the school and national initiatives. There was a sense that

Emily was using, as Piaget (1954), Dewey (1929) and Vygotsky (1978) all maintain, a range of prior knowledge and experiences to influence how she was responding to the RWi approach. Emily's perspective does not conflict with the dominant discourse of teaching reading, in that phonics 'is now widely recognised as an essential component in the teaching of reading' (Dombey, 1999, p.52). However, Emily was challenging the assumption of the effectiveness of SSP. Medwell et al. (1998) were able to show in their study that teachers develop their own philosophy of teaching reading based on their experiences of the issues involved, and Emily appears to be no exception to these findings.

In Emily's transcript she referred to the children not being able to read. The inability to read at the age of four and five is not a situation exclusive to Appleberry Primary School. According to Clark (2017), very few children enter the classroom able to read silently and with understanding. However, the frustration Emily appeared to have with the school approach was that it conflicted with her understandings, in that the school approach to teaching reading did not appear to appreciate the 'different characteristics the individual children have to bring to the reading task' (Clark, 2017, pp.1). Emily's understandings are not unsubstantiated as there are plenty of commentators who support Emily's thinking that children need to understand the relevance of reading in the first instance before moving towards the technicalities of phonics (Brice-Heath, 1983; Browne, 2009; Clark, 1976, 2017; Clay, 1979; Roche, 2015; Wells, 1982). Emily's approach (which can be read in Chapter 4, Section 4.2.2) chimes with the work of Meek (1982), in that Emily draws on rhyme, songs and play to encourage the children to read. Emily recognises that learning to read is much more complicated than the decoding of letters, and she combines various techniques in connection with reading for pleasure to encourage the children's interest in reading (Clark, 2017).

Emily's transcript does not reveal *why* she dismissed the RWi approach from its inception or how she has arrived at her understandings. We can only assume that through her evaluation of the scheme she found it did not align with her understandings and beliefs about teaching reading. What is

known, however, from Emily's transcript, is that her understanding of teaching reading was drawn from the premise that children approach reading in different ways. As Clark (2017) suggests, teaching reading involves interweaving various approaches to get the children interested in reading. Emily adheres to the whole school policy but finds alternative ways of incorporating her understandings of teaching reading into her classroom practice. There are many examples of how Emily demonstrates this (by prioritising: how she organises the classroom environment; the use of role play; a focus on talk; sharing stories), as it is her understanding that these are all important for learning to read.

There was a strong confidence in Emily's dismissal of RWi. She challenged the assumptions being made by the scheme based on her understandings. Unlike the extracts used to illustrate transitional knowing, Emily remained steadfast in her understandings, asserting her own voice in how to teach reading. A characteristic of the independent knowing phase, as suggested by Baxter-Magolda's (2004), is a stronger confidence and, as Emily revealed in her extract, a focus on individual thinking. Noticeable by its absence, however, was that Emily did not take the opportunity to ask searching questions or reassess her knowledge. Emily went no further than sorting and discussing the statements, as she created her concept map to illustrate her practice and understandings.

5.3.2 Summary on Independent Knowing

Independent knowing characterised by the level of confidence displayed by a participant and how they challenge assumptions was clear in Emily's voice on the teaching of reading in particular with the use of systematic synthetic phonics. Her confidence in voicing her own judgements on reading with me during the non-directive interview was apparent, as she challenged the assumptions made by formal knowledge in this context of RWi. She had built her understandings and what to believe based on evaluating evidence from her experience. On my first reading of Emily's transcript, I considered the criteria for contextual knowing, as her understandings were more illustrative of contextual than independent knowing. However, Emily appeared to be compromising her practice by not applying her understandings and knowledge in context, a feature more illustrative of contextual knowing. Emily

has a clear understanding of how to teach reading, yet she finds herself complying with policies and practices which do not align with her own beliefs. The practice she so passionately talked about was hidden and not shared with colleagues. Her perception of the weakness and gaps in the school approach for teaching reading was addressed by incorporating the scheme into her existing practice, rather than Emily voicing her own judgements in collaboration with peers (Alexander, 2009). Such collaborative opportunities would perhaps have allowed Emily to think and talk her concerns and problems through with colleagues potentially leading to a more cohesive approach and removing the school's dependency on templates and reproducible resources. Instead, Emily appeared to have placed a boundary around her practice, where she was able to think for herself and create her own understandings, but there was an inherent weakness in this approach as it was restricting her from being a contextual knower. Baxter-Magolda (2004) argues that the contextual knower thinks problems through based on evaluating evidence, and then integrates and applies the knowledge to develop their practice. Although Emily has created an individual view on the teaching of reading, it is only partially integrated into her practice. It could be suggested that the secure boundary that she has placed around her practice, free from challenge and compromise, has resulted in her potentially not being able to find her critical voice. This is unfortunate, as the critical voice is indicative of the practice of a contextual knower.

5.4 Contextual Knowing

The following comments typified contextual knowing, in which teachers embrace alternative positions in their practice, a practice they have developed based on their knowledge and understanding. Contextual knowing is an understanding which, as Baxter-Magolda (2004) argues, is formed by deciding what to believe by evaluating evidence and by becoming the autonomous agent Dewey portrays as having individual objectives and priorities. The contextual theme in the extracts included in this section was apparent when the teachers appeared to have not only found an independent critical voice, but also recognised that there was an intellectual process that offered validity to their

judgement and perspective. The extracts chosen illustrated how the teachers' sophisticated epistemological understandings were intertwined with their teaching of reading and how the formations of their epistemology demonstrated how they made sense of their approach to teaching reading, within the context in which they work (Baxter-Magolda, 2004).

The extracts were chosen to evidence the contextual knowing phase and were all selected from Ruby's transcript. Aspects of contextual knowing, like all the phases of knowing, appeared in each of the participants' transcripts. However, I chose Ruby's transcript because it contained rich examples of contextual knowing.

In the first extract, Ruby talked about the importance of children seeing other people reading, specifically for children to recognise that learning to read is something achievable (see Chapter 4, Section 4.2.7). Ruby appears to be absolutely clear on what is essential for the teaching of reading and disregards, for the moment, the influence of policy and other aspects that contribute to the teaching of reading in the school. Ruby responds reflectively to the statement 'seeing others reading, children and adults'. There is a sense with Ruby that her thinking has been changed, shaped and altered over the years. She carefully considers what is at the root of learning to read and thinks the whole learning to read process through. She said:

I think this is so important if you consider what it means. It means this is something that is achievable and that you can do it too, you can learn to read (Ruby).

Ruby's understanding of the importance of the child having the belief that they can learn to read is a 'move beyond a utilitarian view of literacy' (Meek, 1982, p.18). Ruby's understanding is that if we want our children to read well, they must perceive reading as something that is achievable and have good and compelling reasons for learning to read. There is a government expectation and drive that all children will learn to read. This is not an unfair expectation and probably an objective that most people would agree with. However, the path Ruby suggests for learning to read goes much deeper than the provision outlined in the National Curriculum for reading. Ruby's position recognised that

children need to have the belief that they can learn to be successful readers, and she integrates this knowledge into her practice. There is a wealth of academic commentary that acknowledges that self-efficacy is a contributing factor in any form of learning (Bandura, 1988; Locke et al., 1981; Schunk and Rice, 1987, 1989). However, self-belief is not written explicitly in the National Curriculum (2014) or the Early Curriculum Framework (2017) as a starting point for learning to read, and therefore is not reflective of the current government discourse around the teaching of reading. The prescriptive elements of national policy on reading make it difficult, but not impossible, for teachers to apply their knowledge and understanding in their practice. Ruby seems to have strong beliefs and prioritises her practice and understanding above the expectations of the school's and to some extent national policy. In her words:

Everything I do, I do on a daily basis for teaching reading, and I always have regardless of year group. This doesn't always sit well with what the school expects, but it's the way I do it. It makes sense to me. I struggle with filtering off bits of teaching reading. This is the way I teach reading, but it's not the way I am asked to teach reading (Ruby).

A central role in how Ruby constructed knowledge and understanding here seemed to stem from her personal epistemology. She draws on years of experience teaching reading and demonstrated the confidence to substantiate her beliefs and practice, and in line with contextual knowing Ruby decided what to believe based on evidence. The evidence Ruby draws on is personal experience, which now shapes and underpins her teaching of reading. Ruby was aware that her approach did not always meet with the approval of management. Nevertheless, she had the confidence to apply her understandings to her practice.

In the next extract, Ruby began to draw conclusions about how teachers teach reading, as she looked at all the statements generated by the staff:

When you see all these statements together it makes you realise how fragmented we now think of reading, rather than a holistic activity. I am not sure how we've got here, but it features in all of our staff meetings and all the conversations we have as a phase group. It's difficult to resolve as we are under such pressure to perform all the time, and that can give you a very different focus.

The teaching of reading and how teachers separate out word recognition and decoding from understanding could be attributed to the Simple View of Reading (SVR). The SVR model modularises reading into sub-skills and therefore sets up artificial boundaries between decoding and comprehension (Mercer and Littleton, 2007). The SVR model, favoured by the Department for Education since 2006, puts a clear separation between the teaching of word recognition and language comprehension (Wyse and Goswami, 2008). The fragmented approach to teaching reading Ruby talked about was probably not a unique set of circumstances specific to Appleberry Primary School, but most likely an approach that schools have adopted in response to National Curriculum guidance. Ruby's observation of how teachers now teach reading is, as Parvin (2014) suggests, a linear process that places decoding first, to be followed subsequently by comprehension. Ruby's understanding of reading appeared to align with the views of Holdaway (1980), Meek (1988), Cain (2010) and Clark (2017) that reading is a complex process. The complex process of teaching reading involves the use and combination of a vast range of skills rather than separating out the skills into a hierarchical order. Ruby, despite the pressure of the curriculum and attainment, was quite clear that her practice was reflective of what she believed was the right approach for teaching children to read. She tried to make the links for the children to see reading as a holistic activity, and as Whitty (2000) notes, to create a link between her expert knowledge and values with her judgement about effective professional practice.

5.4.1 Summary of Contextual Knowing

The data collection process at times proved a source of cognitive dissonance for some of the participants. Unlike in some of the extracts shared in this chapter for analysis, Ruby does not restructure her concept of teaching reading. The process encourages her to share her sense-making on the teaching of reading and her understandings. There was a sense with Ruby's thinking that she had not only found her independent voice, but that she recognised that there needed to be an intellectual process that offered judgement and opinion on the knowledge surrounding the teaching

of reading with critical insight. Ruby appeared to have developed a deep understanding of the teaching of reading. Her questioning and response to the agreed statement set dug deep into her core beliefs. Ruby appeared to amalgamate all the criteria for contextual knowing in her practice. She was self-assured with her knowledge, which to some extent may have come from her success with teaching reading. However, I would argue that it was more than that. Ruby's perception of herself as a teacher was different from her colleagues. Ruby's voice was heard in the school, and she was open with her practice and in many ways was not excluded from discussions around the teaching of reading. Her practice has been developed based on deciding what to believe by evaluating the evidence, drawing on her experience and having the confidence to become an autonomous professional. Notably, the most striking contrast between the independent and contextual knower was demonstrated in the way Ruby's professional autonomy and contextual knowing equipped her to be a curriculum creator and not just curriculum enactor (Castle, 2004). Ruby, unlike the independent knowers, places the children's self-belief at the centre of her practice, and this, together with her teacher autonomy, has allowed her to create a reading curriculum that does more than address the gaps left behind by policy. Ruby places the children at the centre of her teaching provision.

5.5 Summary

In this chapter, I have drawn on extracts from the transcripts which were illustrative of how teachers aligned with the characteristics of one of Baxter-Magolda's phases on the continuum. Baxter-Magolda (1996) presents her continuum as a clear, sequential, almost developmental order of position. The continuum presented difficulties for the analysis, as each phase was representative of participants adopting a more critical perspective on knowledge, with the apex of the continuum being 'contextual knowing' (Rodgers, 2012). The phases on Baxter-Magolda's continuum provided criteria to demonstrate how people actively construct meaning from their experiences and make evaluations by using their current perspective (Baxter-Magolda, 2004). However, in this research, the phases were chosen to be illustrative of the participants' broad understandings of how they construct and make

sense of their practice, rather than one phase of knowing being an advancement over another. Moreover, the themes from the continuum in my study seemed contiguous, as the participants moved freely between the phases while sharing their constructed and reconstructed understandings. While listening to the voices of the participants, as they talked about their experiences and constructed their understandings of teaching reading, it was easy to lose track of which phase on the continuum they were revealing. In my analysis of the participants' transcripts, I found Baxter-Magolda's original criteria of the continuum to be limiting, especially as the participants' transcripts revealed that there was a dynamic element to their understandings as they moved between the phases of the knowing continuum. At times, the teachers demonstrated various ways of knowing, intertwining many of the phases from the continuum, even on occasion when talking about the same focus statement.

The opportunity for the teachers to talk freely about their practice, using the knowledge generated by themselves and colleagues as a starting point (Appendix 7), revealed depth to their thinking, and also became an opportunity for them to reflect on their practice and deepen their understandings. A commonality that emerged in all the teachers' voices was how the teachers drew on their own ideas of what teaching reading should encapsulate. The analysis on the teachers' understandings (whether transitional, independent or contextual) revealed their awareness of the complexity of teaching reading, and how policy and their provision for the children are not mutually cohesive. It emerged that the teachers' depth of understanding about reading and children bridges the gaps and makes the links between policy and classroom practice.

I am not suggesting that all of the teachers bridged the gaps between policy and classroom practice in the same way or indeed to the same extent. Flo, for example, shared that, when she was not being observed teaching RWi, she adapted her practice to draw on much broader influences that are not characteristic of SSP. In contrast, Ruby placed self-belief at the centre of her practice and was overt with her practice. Ruby is asked to teach one way but chooses to use her own understandings to

teach reading. As previously discussed, Evans (2011) suggests that policy and reform should recognise teachers as thinking and subjective beings who have a knowledge and understanding that is often left unseen rather than shared. This study revealed that Emily, Ruby, Flo and Nancy are isolating their practice, arguably because school and national policy does not feel inclusive to them or recognise their professional autonomy. When the teachers' views were sought and valued, they willingly took the opportunity to discuss, share and reflect on their practice.

6 Conclusion

In this final chapter, I revisit and discuss each of the research questions. In addition, I look at the findings that have emerged from my study on my research approach. I discuss the contributions this research has made to new knowledge about teachers' understandings of teaching reading and the impact the research has had on myself and the participants. Finally, I discuss the merits and possible avenues for further research and whether there is scope for research on a much broader scale.

My research sought to explore and reveal the understandings and perceptions held by a small group of primary school teachers on teaching reading. In particular, the research hoped to illuminate, in relation to the teaching of reading, how the teachers' beliefs and experiences influenced their classroom practice and how they were making sense of national policy. Additionally, the research was interested in how the research participants welcomed the opportunity to work collaboratively with colleagues to share their expertise. A body of literature supports the view that the teaching profession is being adjusted to an occupational group of craft-based technicians whose function is to deliver a prescribed learning programme (Ball, 2013; Evans, 2011; Furlong, 2010; Giroux, 2010; Whitty, 2014). What was striking in this study, however, was how all of the teachers recognised that there was an element of flexibility in their teaching day. The teachers used the flexibility to provide the children with a more cohesive approach to learning to read. Within the context in which they work, the teachers structured their teaching around their own understandings and perspectives of teaching reading and adjusted their practice in response to the needs of each cohort. Each of the teachers acknowledged the need to accommodate the demands of national and school policy but found ways to bring their understandings and perspectives into their teaching to bridge the gaps left behind by policy. Evans (2008) contends that government policy and reform should recognise teachers' perspectives and beliefs and demonstrate a degree of flexibility where expectations of uniformity and standardisation are concerned. For Evans, teaching professionals should be seen as autonomous agents with control over their work, but she worries that this is being swept aside with

little regard for their subjectivity and the inter-subjective dimension of teaching practice. All of my research questions were concerned with representing teachers' expertise and understandings and provided opportunities for the participants to engage with others and share their practice.

RQ1: What do teachers view as important in their teaching of reading?

My first research question was influenced by the desire to represent and explore the accounts of teachers. Through IPA, I tried to capture a thoughtful reflection of the teachers making sense of their practice, understanding and beliefs around the teaching of reading so that the reader would be able to relate to the participants. RQ1 assisted me as the researcher to keep in mind Denzin's (1995) criticism of educational research conducted in school, in that the voices of participants can often be drowned out in an academic study, something that I was keen to avoid. It was important for me to try and share the authentic voices of Emily, Flo, Nancy and Ruby. The account shared needed to reflect that the voices were representative of real people talking about real experiences. IPA has been an appropriate way of presenting the lived experiences and what the teachers, in this study, view as crucial in their teaching of reading.

As I read through the transcripts and began my analysis of the teachers making sense of their practice, the factors engagement, interest and access for the children emerged as the marked priorities for the teachers. Despite the regulation of assessment and National Curriculum guidance on teaching reading, the teachers' views were very much about the child and placing the child at the centre of the process. All the teachers reflected on how they facilitated learning to read. Through thoughtful discourse, each of the teachers made sense of their practice and considered how as a teacher they each adjusted the provision to ensure that the children were not only learning to read but were engaging with and enjoying their reading. A commonality with all the teachers was the desire to create an interest in reading for the children. The teachers generated interest with their knowledge of children's literature, drawing on the children's personal experiences and seeing talk as a highly important element in learning to read.

Both Ruby and Emily clearly considered children's self-belief and the desire to learn to read as important for teaching reading. As is demonstrated in Ruby's transcript, she considered self-belief as of paramount importance in the teaching of reading and something which, as Ruby says, 'can be overlooked'. Although Ruby considered her practice holistically, self-belief was the most important factor for her, and at the core of children learning to read.

RQ2: How do teachers receive and respond to the influence of school and official policy in their practice?

Educational policy, whether that produced by government or individual schools, is influential on teaching and learning. The formulation of my second research question was influenced by the underpinning theory of social constructivism and sought to make sense of how the teachers receive and respond to policy in their practice. RQ2 hoped to uncover the scope teachers had to build their understandings and interpretations of policy in its implementation. Through the influence of IPA, I was able to create a sympathetic account of how the participants create their practice and consider their role of teaching reading within and outside of policy.

My research with Appleberry Primary School revealed the teachers' working understandings of policy at both the local and national levels. The experience of working with the participants also revealed how they integrated their own knowledge of teaching reading with the changes occurring in relation to policy. The teachers not only adjusted their practice to fit in with policy but also to align with their own beliefs and understandings. Many of the themes emerging in my data in relation to RQ2 show how the teachers were working with policy, and also that they used their professional and personal experience to adjust and enrich their teaching practice where they felt the policy was insufficient in its provision for the children's understanding. The participants' accounts of their practices revealed that policy influenced them. However, government and school policy was perceived to be only a starting point for provision, and teachers felt that a great deal more needed to be included in the teaching of reading. Each of the teachers acknowledged that the implementation

of new policy often involved some compromise to their practice, but the teachers had the understanding that they could adjust their teaching accordingly and saw this as very much part of their role as a teacher. Interestingly, Flo felt that she could not be quite so overt, and talked about the differences between the approaches adopted during a lesson observation in contrast to that which happened on a more regular basis.

A recurring theme in the teachers' transcripts was that of conflict with National Curriculum policy in relation to systematic synthetic phonics. Most notably, my data reveals that the teachers working in Early Years and Key Stage One (Flo, Emily and Ruby) did not appear to value the priorities that were set by the programme but complied, possibly, because of wider school timetable arrangements with other classrooms. There was also an element of compliance with the teaching of phonics in Year 5. Nancy had a group of children that still attended phonics sessions at the expense of missing out on classroom discussions. However, although the teachers expected to teach SSP were doing so, each teacher felt it was not enough on its own to teach children how to read. All of the teachers indicated, to some extent, that as part of their practice they had created wider opportunities to meet the children's needs.

RQ3: Are the understandings the teachers have fixed or can they be shaped by interactions?

The final research question reflects the influence of the theoretical underpinnings of the study, as there is a consensus that social constructivism is concerned with empowering individuals to create their understandings. Given that the teachers would need opportunities to exchange and build alternative ideas and perspectives, the data collection methods of concept mapping and non-directive interviews were specially chosen to facilitate a mechanism for individual development and interaction. As part of this study's exploration into a small group of teachers' understandings about the teaching of reading, RQ3 sought to reveal whether their understandings were fixed or could be shaped through interactions with peers.

While being aware of the limitations of trying to ascertain whether or not the teachers' understandings were fixed or could be shaped through interaction, it was hoped that the sensitive and interactional nature of the interviews would enable the participants to feel confident to re-evaluate and augment their understandings. As part of the data collection, participants were engaged in an activity that enabled them to explore their subjective views and reveal their understandings through conversations with colleagues on their expertise in teaching reading. The whole school event, where the participants created a shared knowledge in the form of a statement set, provided a collaborative opportunity to shape the teachers' thinking. The event set the tone for the participants' engagement with ideas and knowledge sharing on what they considered to be important for learning to read.

The concept mapping method facilitated the non-directive interviews by providing a focus task. The participants were able to talk through their subjective understandings. The use of concept maps provided a vehicle for the participants' thinking, in that the process of constructing a map provided the participants with the opportunity to consider, clarify and reflect on their practice. The task required them to organise and prioritise the statements, prompting a dialogue of contemplation, which I believe is not normally heard. Though it is difficult to provide one definitive answer to RQ3, the data appears to suggest that the teachers were adaptable with their understandings. When the participants had the opportunity to consider the collaborative knowledge of their peers through reflection on their practice, the teachers questioned their practice and re-evaluated their understandings. An implication of the suggestion that teachers in this study were shaped by interactions is that their understandings may well have been fixed without the opportunity to discuss their practice and explore their multiple understandings of teaching reading with colleagues. Although it is difficult to say whether the teachers' practice would have remained the same without their involvement in the research, this study has been able to capture a moment where the teachers were engaging with colleagues and a process that gave them an opportunity to re-evaluate their practice.

6.1 Findings Emerging in Research Design

This study set out to uncover and value teachers' understandings of teaching reading with exploratory research questions concerned with representing teachers' professional expertise. The data collection methods were faithful to the social constructivist underpinnings of the research, providing opportunities for interaction between the participants and engagement with potentially different understandings. The collaborative experience at the beginning of the data collection process for the participants was particularly important for me, as I wanted the teachers to have the chance to engage with the differing perspectives shared through discourse at the whole school event. Although collective understandings were captured in the statement set, what I did not acquire was a recording of the conversations held between the colleagues at the whole school event. The recording of the discussions at the whole school event would have provided further data on the collaborative exchange of understandings. Consequently, if the study were repeated I would undoubtedly capture this source of data.

At the beginning of my research, I was under the impression that the concept maps produced by the participants would be a source of data that would reveal the depth of their understandings. However, the role of the concept map became more that of a vehicle for them to talk freely rather than a data source to interpret separately. The construction of the concept maps encouraged the teachers to think and speak openly about their practice and beliefs.. By putting something tangible (the statement set generated at the whole school event, Appendix 7) in front of them as they talked, the concept maps facilitated the participants' thinking as they explored their subjective views. The open-endedness of the task led to responses that provided a candid portrayal of their practice. The teachers' views visibly altered as they considered each of the statements from the statement set, and they constructed and reconstructed their understandings through a reflective process.

Using concept maps and the theory of social constructivism to research teachers' understandings of the teaching of reading opened up unexpected and unknown aspects of teachers' practice. While my initial research questions had been concerned with revealing the depth of

teachers' understandings and encouraging opportunities for the participants to talk freely, the teachers became very much active participants in the research. The research questions set at the beginning of the study were necessary for the nature of the thesis but were centred originally on gleaning information from the participants and sharing their voices. However, an unexpected outcome of the approach taken was that data collected was more than information to be gleaned and shared. The data collection became a forum for the teachers to share their understandings and the research had meaning for the participants involved. The teachers' involvement in my study provided not only data for my thesis but an opportunity for them to raise questions about what they teach and how they teach in a research process that recognised them as transformative intellectuals.

Listening to the teachers making sense of their experiences with the teaching of reading has been interesting for me, and the shape and design of my study was a contributing factor for the depth of understanding the participants shared in the research. So much of what teachers are exposed to in their day-to-day work concerns the question of how to teach, how to think, and policies to implement into their existing practice, yet the methods employed for this research appear to have presented an opportunity for the teachers to share their understandings. The nature of the task encouraged the participants, who I would argue were conscious of their own professional development, to engage in an activity to explore their subjective views. To some extent, the potential barriers between the participants and me, the researcher, were removed, as they at first worked collectively as a group and then as individuals to make sense of their practice. My research was presented in such a way that the participants felt valued for their differing perspectives, and the valuing of my participants may have gone some way to begin to negate potential barriers.

In my original design of the data collection methods, I considered the implications for the loss of potentially valuable data if I did not record the voices of the participants speaking so openly about their practice as they completed the concept maps. However, my adaptation of Kane and Trochim's (2007) concept mapping model to include the use of the teachers' voices proved to be instrumental in the success of collecting the teachers' understandings and sense-making of their practice. The

construction of the maps encouraged the teachers to reveal their perceptions with honesty. As Kane and Trochim suggest, the active process of forming concept maps stimulates both reflection and openness. Concept mapping provided a good foundation for the teachers' thinking and allowed them to illustrate their understandings of teaching reading and to make connections to the whole school shared contributions. Smith et al. (2009) suggest that good IPA studies demonstrate 'an appreciation of the interactional nature of data collection within the interview' (p.180). I would argue that within this piece of research the concept maps enhanced the interactional nature of the interviews by stimulating and engaging the participants and augmenting the interview data into a richer and broader data source.

6.2 Contribution of New Knowledge and Implications

Contributions to new knowledge and the implications of my research fall into three areas. The first is that my research has revealed teachers' thinking on how they teach reading, and that there is an explicit partitioning between policy and provision. All the teachers believed that more needed to be done on the teaching of reading and felt as part of their role that it was necessary to fill the gaps they perceived to have been created by policy. The second is the impact of my study on the participants and to some extent myself. Finally, the research approach taken could be an alternative way of conducting continuous professional development for teachers, in that it is an inclusive approach to research that facilitates professional development through opportunities to discuss and explore different perspectives through reflection on practice.

Firstly, my research has contributed to the developing knowledge on what we know about how teachers teach reading. The understandings shared by Emily, Flo, Nancy and Ruby all revealed how there is now a clear partitioning in their thinking between policy and provision, for example when they spoke about phonics as something that is taught separately. They all felt that part of their role was to fill in the gaps left behind by policy, and as such viewed themselves as agents mediating policy with their own beliefs and understandings. The teachers all felt that areas tested in the primary

curriculum were given higher priority by the school. The result of some areas of reading having a higher priority is that other areas have fallen by the wayside, for example reading for pleasure and enriching children's experience. The approach taken by the teachers in my study was reflective of meeting the expectations of the National Curriculum and Year 1 Screening Check, yet the teachers were trying to make sense of the fragmented approach to teaching reading, and they all talked about what they did to support the children's reading. Each of the teachers was drawing on their much wider knowledge to make the process of learning to read coherent for the children. I think Ruby captured the perspectives of all the participants with her closing statement in the interview by saying:

When you see all these statements together it makes you realise how fragmented we now think of reading, rather than a holistic activity. I am not sure how we've got here, but it features in all of our staff meetings and all the conversations we have as a phase group. It's difficult to resolve, as we are under such pressure to perform all the time, and that can give you a very different focus.

Emily, Flo, Nancy and Ruby were all intensely interested in the child and placed children at the centre of their teaching provision and saw learning to read as holistic and based on the child's self-belief. At times the expectations of the school policy conflicted with their ideas, yet the teachers tried to provide a rich experience for the children based on their understandings of teaching reading.

Secondly, my study appears to have had an impact on the research participants beyond their involvement in the data collection. There has been regular contact between myself and two of the participants, Ruby and Emily. Although the first contact after the meetings was made by me to thank the participants for their time and to share with them a copy of the transcript for their agreement, there has been further contact from Ruby and Emily. The emails (Appendix 11) have developed into a regular discourse about their reflections on practice, things they are doing in their classrooms, books they are reading, courses they have enrolled in to pursue their continuous professional development opportunities, and small groups they have set up, which emulate my data collection process. I have been invited to join the small groups but as yet not managed to attend the meetings. The content of the emails appears to be illustrative of Ruby and Emily reforming their understandings and evidence of them playing an active role in their professional development and developing their perceptions.

With the teachers in my study continuing to share their understandings on the teaching of reading through emails, it is interesting to consider how willing the teachers are to collaborate and share thinking and understandings, which potentially could be left unsaid. The teachers continue to reveal their understandings which prior to the research they would possibly have not been aware of, as Emily said in a recent email:

You know, I don't think I have thought this deeply about what I know about teaching reading before. I am enjoying my teaching of reading at the moment, and the kids are getting so much out of the lessons. I think it is my rekindled or new way of thinking.

Reviewing the research undertaken with Appleberry School and the staff has heightened my awareness of the importance of teacher contributions to research and leads into my final point on how the research approach taken could be an alternative for continuous professional development (CPD).

Finally, the data collection methods used in my research were employed initially to capture the voices of the teachers so that they shared their understandings, but the collaborative opportunities in the study have extended further than I originally envisaged. My research, in its collaborative approach, has provided opportunities for the research participants to have the chance to not only participate in but to be an active part of the research process. By an active part, I mean that the research process actively encouraged the participants to engage professionally in sharing their understandings and also invited the teachers to challenge and re-evaluate their practice. The use of concept mapping encouraged the participants to not only consider the statements generated by their peers but also to reveal their thinking. The teachers were not just answering questions or responding to set tasks; there was fluidity in the task that required the teachers to decide how to respond with regards to their practice. The voices recorded were evidence of them thinking out loud, as they were not responding directly to research questions but actively steering the direction of the interview based on their understandings and their practice. The work of Cliff-Hodges (2016) suggests that teachers involved in their own research into the teaching of reading deepens their

understandings as they reflect on their work and consider future possibilities. The active participation of the teachers in this research has seemingly had a similar outcome, in that the inclusive approach to my research deepened the teachers' understandings. The data indicates that their responses were genuinely challenging their thinking and contributing to their professional development. The use of concept mapping and the statement set generated by the whole school gave the participants ownership of the data and their responses were more natural. In some sense, it appears to be a more ethical approach to educational research and perhaps a research approach more in line with Reed's (2016) thoughts that researchers need to have a greater awareness of the research participants and look for ways their research can be more inclusive. The impact of my study is a contribution to academic research, but equally, I feel it has had an impact on deepening the teachers' understandings and their professional development, as the social constructivist paradigm adopted for this study would predict, and as I hoped from the outset would be the case.

The use of Baxter-Magolda's (1996) continuum also emerged as a flexible approach that was able to draw out the teachers' understandings. In a combination of Baxter-Magolda's continuum for analysis together with the open-ended task of concept mapping and non-directive interviews, the teachers revealed their understandings and perceptions. When presented with the opportunity to discuss their practice, the teachers revealed multiple understandings on the teaching of reading and called on many ways of knowing before arriving at a position. The approach taken in my research recognised that teachers' professional development occurs at different stages, different introductory points and different levels of knowledge. Although the teachers were working with the same information (the statement set), they engaged with the concept mapping activity at different levels, providing them with a mechanism for individual development. In each of the transcripts, the participants could be heard challenging and setting objectives for themselves that were directly related to their practice. Although Baxter-Magolda's (2004) continuum of contextual knowing is regarded as being hierarchical, within this study, the participants demonstrated that their understandings were not at a fixed point on the continuum but dynamic. The participants' transcripts

revealed that they moved through multiple levels of the continuum to form responses and constructed their knowledge in a dynamic process of re-evaluation and reflection. For example, although Ruby presented herself as a contextual knower, during her interview Ruby's thinking demonstrated aspects of transitional and independent knowing as she contemplated her teaching practice. As such, within this study Baxter-Magolda's (2004) continuum was not used as a tool to assess where the teachers sat on the continuum but naturally developed into a means of revealing the complexities of the teachers' understandings and how they were formed.

6.3 Opportunities for Further Research

I believe that my thesis opens up the potential for many further research projects possibly on a much broader scale. My research has focused on the shared understandings of Emily, Flo, Nancy and Ruby, all from the same school. There is, however, much broader potential to look at the shared understandings of teachers from different schools and within different roles, and to pursue further the idea that teachers may be filling the gaps that they perceived policy to have created. One research area of particular interest for me would be to explore how school mentors are balancing their own understandings against those of national policy on the teaching of reading when guiding and nurturing the practice of the student teachers they mentor. It would also be interesting to investigate the experience of new teachers in different types of school as well as teachers at various stages of their career. Investigating their understandings within their school communities and in the wider community would provide an insight into how teachers develop their understandings and empower the teachers by providing them with opportunities to reflect on and re-evaluate their practice with discussions with colleagues not just from their own school but also neighbouring schools. Given the rise of academy schools, multi-academy trusts, and the various routes into teaching, the understandings held by the teachers will almost certainly be varied. Opportunities to share and explore their understandings and identify areas for their continuous professional

development would presumably be welcomed by the teachers but also be a significant contribution to academic research on teachers' understandings about the teaching of reading.

6.4 Final Thoughts

During the completion of this thesis, my role has shifted from teacher to postgraduate student, teacher researcher and now a university lecturer completing this research. The shifting roles have facilitated the collaboration with others in different ways and helped me to use their different perspectives to design and improve my research. My ongoing conversations with Emily and Ruby provide me with multiple opportunities for exploring my own questions and challenging my thoughts, understandings and perspectives on teaching reading. My professional practice and pedagogy have been developed and shaped by the data collection methods used for this thesis. I now approach the teaching of teaching reading with my university students with discussion opportunities and encourage the students to work collaboratively to share their experiences of being readers and teachers of reading. At the centre of my professional practice is the principle that my students are developing understandings for themselves integrating the knowledge they have acquired with their own beliefs and experiences. My study into the understandings and perceptions of teaching reading told by Emily, Flo, Nancy and Ruby has provided collaborative opportunities, which I recognise could have much to offer the professional development of teachers. Emily, Flo, Nancy and Ruby engaged with the research in a positive way, and I would tentatively suggest that they gained a great deal from the experience in relation to their understandings of teaching reading. In my communication with Emily and Ruby, after the research data collection events, they indicated to me that they have emulated the concept mapping method in professional development sessions in schools where they are currently employed. Additionally, in response to my invitation, both Emily and Ruby have expressed an interest in attending the University's Primary English Research Hub.

From a researcher's perspective, this research in conjunction with the programme of the Doctorate in Education has provided me with reflective critical thinking skills, improved attention to

detail, and a greater awareness of the importance of communication in research. My thoughts for future research at the moment are to reflect on the work carried out in this study and consider the possibility to develop not only what we understand about the teaching of reading but how teachers deepen their understandings through collaborative and shared experiences. I want to explore further how the collaboration between the researcher and participants during research can have a direct impact on the professional development of participants and the researcher. In the introduction to this thesis, I stated that my initial interest in researching primary school teachers' understandings about the teaching of reading was in part intended to support student teachers with their initial entry point into teaching reading by developing an awareness of the provision provided by school teaching staff. In approaching the end of this research, I feel that my knowledge and understanding of teachers' practices in relation to the teaching of reading have been considerably enhanced. In carrying out this research, I have been in the privileged position of being able to listen to and share the important voices of four primary school teachers giving an insight into their understandings, concerns and hopes in relation to the teaching of reading.

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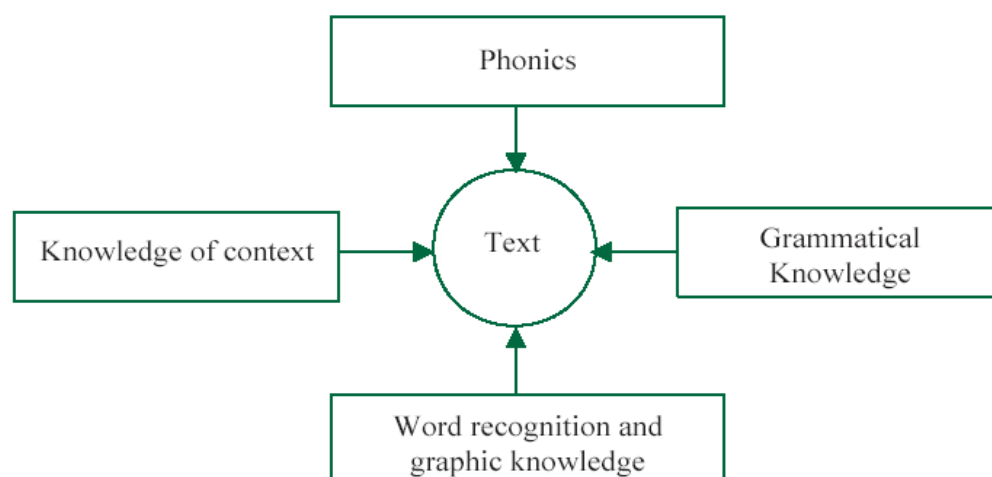
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Appendices

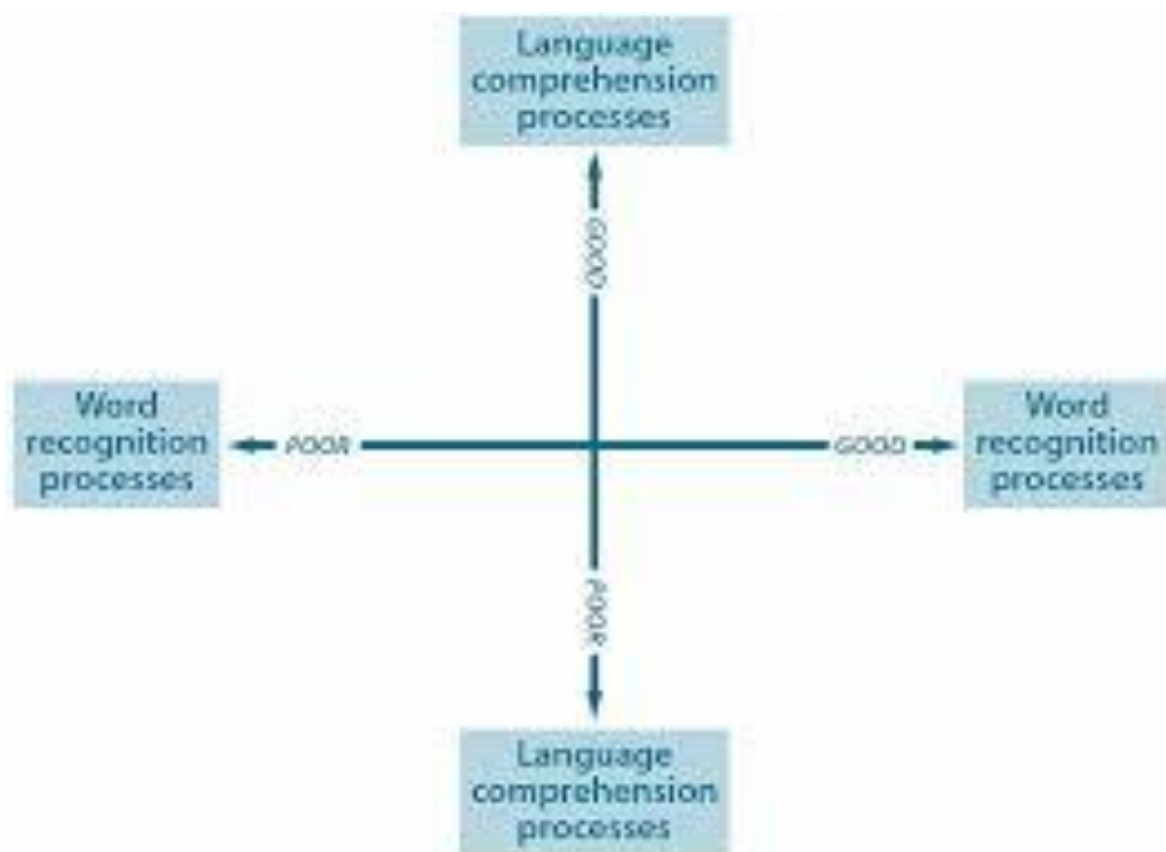
Appendix 1

Searchlights Model – taken from the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) 1998



Appendix 2

The Simple View of Reading Model (SVR) - taken from the Rose Review (2006)



Appendix 3

Introductory email to Appleberry Primary School

Thank you for expressing an interest in my research and potentially taking part in the study. The research is about teachers' perceptions and understanding of teaching reading. The research is looking at gaining an understanding of the tacit knowledge teachers have to help children learn to read. Your school's choice of reading programme, scheme or approach isn't important to the study it is more an emphasis on the teachers who teach the reading in your school.

The proposed research will be a qualitative study with the use of concept maps to collect data from the teachers. I have chosen concept maps, as this method appears to be suitable for open-ended questions, which are exploratory in nature through conversations taking place while the concept maps are being constructed. The concept map can also capture diversity in responses and provide explanations that closed survey questions are not able to capture.

In pilots of the study, teachers have found the concept mapping process to be an exercise which they enjoy and revives their teaching of reading, as they recognise how important the subtleties of what they do has an impact on the outcomes for the children. The pilots have also helped with schools' CPD, where teachers have acknowledged that they need to develop further their knowledge and understanding of teaching reading.

I would welcome the opportunity to come in and meet with you to discuss the research further. I am certain diary dates are difficult, so to begin to find a match I have these days where I can be quite flexible on time if either is convenient for you: 14th March or 16th March.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Best wishes

Appendix 4

Headteacher briefing sheet

The aims of the research:

To understand teachers' perceptions and understanding of teaching reading.
The aim is to complete the thesis by September 2018

Outline of school's Involvement:

The research will involve the whole school staff in the first phase of the data collection. The aim of the whole school event is to collect the shared knowledge of teaching reading in the school. The process is designed to be participatory and collaborative, and representative of what the teachers understand about the teaching of reading.

The second phase of the research will use the data collected, now in the form of a 'generated statement set'. All teachers will be invited to take part in this phase, but not all will want to proceed with the research. In this phase, the teachers will be asked to complete interpretable maps and talk about their practice. The sessions will be digitally recorded. It is likely that the teachers will be reflective about their practice. I will ask the teachers to prioritise some of the statements to provide data to compare and contrast practice.

After the schools' part of the research has been completed, I will type up transcripts from the 1:1 meetings and send them to the relevant teachers for agreement. I will also share my findings with the school and individuals in the school once the research has been completed.

Timescale

March 2016-
Email to Headteacher with details of research and possible date for first meeting Meeting with Headteacher of research school to agree dates, requirements and final arrangements for the whole school event
June 2016-
Whole school event held at the school involved with the research
July 2016-
1:1 meetings with teachers to complete interpretable maps and conduct non-directive interviews
August 2016-
Transcripts of non-directive interviews to be sent to participants for clarification and agreement

Ethical considerations

The school and all individual contributions will remain anonymous throughout the research
The school and participating teachers may withdraw from the research at any time
I will seek permission from the teachers before recording the interviews
The participants and school will remain anonymous in the thesis.
Any details likely to lead to identification will be removed from the final publication of the thesis.
All tapes, transcripts, maps, field notes relating to the school and participants will be destroyed on completion of the research.

Appendix 5

PowerPoint Slides used at the whole school event

The Teaching of Reading

Rachael Stone
rachael.stone@canterbury.ac.uk



What the Research Seeks to Understand

The research seeks to understand teachers' perceptions about the teaching of reading.

What do you think, feel and do?




Thinking about Reading

Consider your reading journey.




Thinking about Reading

Consider and discuss.

1. What experiences have your most able pupils had that could contribute to their ability to read?
2. What experiences have your less able pupils not had that could possibly be hindering their reading ability and understanding?



Research Task— Phase 1

What do you believe is important for children to become an accomplished reader? Generate words and phrases related to how children learn to read.

An awareness of stories.

Knowledge of words.

Question what they are reading.



Research Task— Phase 1

Combine your post it notes and talk through each one with a partner. Eliminate any duplicates and ensure what you have written can be clearly understood.

All of the statements generated represent your collective knowledge of teaching reading and will be used in phase 2 of the research project.



Research Task— Phase 2

An informal recorded interview involving a concept mapping task using the statements generated tonight.




Appendix 6

Description and detail of data collection process

The whole school event – Phase 1 of data collection

- The whole school event was attended by myself and all teaching staff at Appleberry Primary School.
- Introduction to Myself and Research (see Appendix 5 for accompanying PowerPoint Slides).
- A general discussion on how the teachers learnt to read and how learning to read was facilitated for them.
- I explained that we were going to generate statements on the teaching of reading (see Appendix 7).
- I asked the question - What do you believe is important for children to become an accomplished reader?
- The participants began to discuss their practice e.g. what they did in their classroom and how this varied dependent on the children. Multiple understandings were revealed.
- The teachers began to generate statements. I actively got involved in the discussions with the teachers to keep the discussion on track.
- All statements were accepted – this part of the meeting took approximately 20 minutes.
- Once all the statements had been generated they needed to be reduced into an agreed statement set, ready for use in phase two of the data collection.

Preparing the statement set

- The participants had worked in smaller groups to generate their ideas so there was an element of duplication which needed to be removed from the whole school statement set.
- A number of factors contribute to the reduction of the statement set: repeated statements, statements phrased differently but could be considered the same thing for example: bedtime stories and a story at bedtime.
- The participants were given the following criteria for reducing the statement set: 1) that only one idea is represented on each 'Post-it'; 2) that each of the statements are relevant to the focus; 3) to remove any duplicates so that the statement set is manageable for participants in the next stage of the research; 4) to edit statements for clarity and comprehension.
- The statement set was collated and agreed by the staff at the school.
- I used the 'Post-it' notes to organise the agreed statement set into a table and manageable numerical list (Appendix 7).
- This statement set was in no particular order, but provided an efficient way to look at the agreed statement set.

The non-directive interviews and concept maps – Phase 2 of data collection

- Four teachers chose to take part in the second phase of the research.
- The teachers were each interviewed separately.
- Each teacher was given a set of Post-it notes populated with the agreed statement set and large sheets of paper to construct concept maps.
- The teachers were asked: *What do you believe is important for children to become accomplished readers? How important are the statements in your daily teaching of reading? Is there a conflict/comparison with your personal view and approach to the teaching of reading with government and school policy?* No further questions were asked and each participant responded to the task and stimulus.
- Each teacher used the statement set written on Post-it notes as a prompt for the non-directive interview transcript and the construction of concept maps.

- Each teacher was recorded as they talked through their practice and constructed concept maps.
- The teachers were given instructions for constructing their concept maps: They could construct as many or as few maps as they wished. There was not to be a miscellaneous group but they could disregard statements and if necessary not include in any of the maps (none of the teachers did this). Each of the statements could only be used once.
- When the teachers had finished constructing their maps, I asked them to give each map a title, if they had not already done so.
- The Post-it notes were secured with tape to the large sheets of paper and photographs were taken. A copy of the photographs were shared with the participants. This completed the data collection process.

Appendix 7

Appleberry Primary School agreed statement set

1. Valuing books	2. Pronunciation of words	3. Predicting
4. Questioning what they are reading	5. Quality time to read	6. Books with words the children can read alone
7. Discussion about what they have read	8. Celebrating books and reading	9. Sight vocabulary
10. To hear stories about people they know	11. Repetition of stories	12. Environmental print
13. Traditional stories	14. Lots of practice	15. Support for learning to read
16. Bedtime stories	17. Bringing personal experiences to help with understanding of texts	18. Real books and authors
19. A literacy rich environment	20. Rhythm and rhyme of stories	21. Exciting texts
22. Using toys to put stories into context	23. Talking	24. Decoding skills
25. Oral story telling	26. Understanding pictures	27. High frequency words
28. To know that words have meaning	29. Opportunities to read in different places	30. Fluency when reading
31. Visits to libraries	32. Enjoyment	33. Role play and drama
34. Visits to bookshops	35. Enjoying the sounds of words	36. Role models for reading
37. To be exposed to a variety of genres	38. Alliteration and word play	39. Varied media for reading
40. Picture books	41. Confidence to try new books	42. Books as gifts
43. Magazines and comics	44. Re-reading favourite books	45. Alphabet
46. Reading for pleasure	47. Drawing on what they have read before	48. Rich language
49. Reading for information	50. A knowledge of how stories work	51. selection of books to choose from
52. Developing early comprehension skills	53. Fiction	54. Eye sight checked
55. Language development	56. Non-fiction	57. Hearing checked
58. Knowledge of vocabulary	59. Don't force children to read	60. Seeing others reading – children and adults
61. Phonic knowledge	62. Important to read to babies	63. Children changing the endings of known stories

Appendix 8

Sample analysis pages using emergent themes – Ruby's transcript

Emergent Themes	Extract from Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>Growth mind-set</p> <p>Teacher thinking/Child thinking</p> <p>Considering</p> <p>Empathy/Experiential connections with texts</p> <p>Reading and pleasure</p> <p>Considered and measured response</p>	<p>Ruby</p> <p>I think this is so important if you consider what it means. It means this is something that is achievable and that you can do it too, you can learn to read. That self-belief in children is so important for children to learn to read and something which can be overlooked. I've put the statement right in the centre of the map, as I think together with early experiences of reading, can sow the seed of successful reading journey. Sometimes we have the expectation that we can teach reading without considering what the child thinks about the task in front of them.</p> <p>This is really important too ____ Children need to make early connections with books, Ok, for example, oh ____ I don't know, ____ if they haven't had a life experience of going to a shopping mall then the Biff and Chip book about going up and down the escalators is not going to be funny to them, ____ or interesting. ____ You can teach understanding, of course you can, but the immediacy of their enjoyment and understanding is just not there ____ it also removes the pleasure from reading too.</p> <p>Teaching Year 2 can be quite tricky, as most of the children come into the class able to read the text – but a large proportion of them don't understand what they are reading. Which is a shame, but ____ also difficult for us as Year two teachers, as we are assessed on how the children understand what they read. That's why I have made a large group on the sheet (concept map) which includes everything I do on a daily basis for teaching reading, and I</p>	<p>Ruby has no difficulty in articulating what is important for her in teaching reading. There is a clear sense that she has a depth to her understanding of teaching reading. Is this something she has possibly considered before? Not clear whether there was a critical incident to prompt her thinking previously.</p> <p>Again a sense that Ruby is confident with her knowledge on how to teach reading. She does not question her practice but confident to share her experiences and practice.</p> <p>A recognition that children need much more than the text presented in front of them to interact and interrogate the text.</p>

Conflict/assertive/professional judgement	<p>always have regardless of year group. This doesn't always sit well with what the school expects, ____ but it's the way I do it. ____ It makes sense to me. I struggle with filtering off bits of teaching reading. This is the way I teach reading but it's not the way I am asked to teach reading. I am asked, or rather, Reception and Year 1 are asked to focus on just phonics and high frequency words first, before considering understanding and meaning-making, the reason for reading.</p> <p>I have created the second group in a type of arch/circle type thing around the edge of my core practice, as I know this is all happening but some of them are as a result of what we have been learning in a different context. This for example: 'exciting texts' are great but what is an exciting text? Is it something that starts out with the intention of being exciting, or is it exciting because we understand what we are reading, or because we have had a discussion about it and lots of questions have emerged which make it exciting? I think it is one of the many statements which are as a result of having the reading skills to read and understand a book.</p>	<p><i>don't understand what they are reading.</i> – suggests that there have been critical incidents which may have shaped her practice.</p> <p>An ownership of her teaching is emerging – an awareness on what the children need but an awareness that the school is looking for something different.</p>
Considering/thought		<p><i>with filtering off bits of teaching reading-</i> Where is this coming from? Who is asking her to filter bits of reading off?</p>
Making links with other aspects of teaching reading.		<p>Confidence here with her practice and an awareness that all this is in place in her practice. Ruby wasn't taken by surprise with any of the statements, yet considered them in a deep and reflective way</p>
Questioning herself – Reflective?	<p>This tiny group is not really relevant for just reading and to some extent they are not in my full control. Obviously I would speak to parents about sight and eye checks if I had noticed something in class, beyond that, it is out of my control – perhaps mention it to the family liaison officer if nothing is done. Important to read to babies, I agree is important for learning to read, but not something I can't alter when you teach six year olds.</p>	<p>Barriers which she has obviously come up against in her practice</p>

<p>Beyond her control/jurisdiction</p> <p>Distinguishing her responsibilities as a professional.</p>		
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Appendix 9

Sample analysis pages using Baxter-Magolda's knowledge continuum – Nancy

Phase on Baxter-Magolda's Continuum	Participant Transcript	Initial Comments
Absolute Knowing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Works within their comfort zone. • Construes formal learning. • Uses expert knowledge. • Knowledge is certain and comes from authorities. • Reproduction of knowledge. • Focus on acquisition and achievement of knowledge. 	Nancy's Original Transcript <p>Gosh! __ this is a massive oversight on my part, I've never considered drawing on the children's personal experience. I've perhaps made links with my own experience__ but never considered giving the children opportunities to draw on theirs. I feel a bit ashamed about that now__ something I need to think about that's for sure. The last book we read, as a class, I'd chosen because they potentially could relate to the characters, but not given them the opportunity to do it. I need to think about how I might do that at the start of next year__ with my new class.</p>	My Exploratory Comments <p>Is Nancy working within her comfort zone here?</p> <p>Is Nancy conscious about having to think about this? Is there a link here to reflective practice? Is this something that comes natural to Nancy?</p> <p>An awareness of the concept of drawing on children's experience but not applied to her teaching. Was this because she didn't see the relevance – although she hints at the</p>

		potential to relate to characters. Might not have known how to make the link within the context of a reading lesson.
Transitional Knowing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begins to adopt a more critical perspective. • Beginning to form own understandings. • Beginning to understand that authority can be unreliable. • Acceptance that some knowledge is uncertain. 	<p>Gosh! ____ this is a massive oversight on my part, I've never considered drawing on the children's personal experience.</p> <p>I've perhaps made links with my own experience____ but never considered giving the children opportunities to draw on theirs. I feel a bit ashamed about that now____</p> <p>something I need to think about that's for sure. The last book we read, as a class, I'd chosen because they potentially could relate to the characters, but not given them the opportunity to do it. I need to think about how I might do that at the start of next year__ with my new class.</p>	<p>Clear sense of an oversight – pushing Nancy to think in a new way. A move away from what she has been doing in her practice.</p> <p>She makes the link with how she has previously been thinking with her choice of text and characters the children could relate to and engage with.</p> <p>Beginning to form new understandings. Reflective and questioning self.</p> <p>A movement in her understanding – but builds on what she knows already</p>

		<p>Challenging her thinking & developing her understanding</p> <p>Language choice is developmental and reflective and some uncertainty – something I need to think about, might do that next year, oversight.</p>
<p>Independent Knowing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stronger confidence emerges. • Able to challenge assumptions. • Knowledge is mostly viewed as uncertain. • A confidence to think for oneself and creating individualised truths. • Establishing and understanding subjective points of view. 	<p>Gosh! ____ this is a massive oversight on my part, I've never considered drawing on the children's personal experience. I've perhaps made links with my own experience ____ but never considered giving the children opportunities to draw on theirs. I feel a bit ashamed about that now ____ something I need to think about that's for sure. The last book we read, as a class, I'd chosen because they potentially could relate to the characters, but not given them the opportunity to do it. I need to think about how I might do that at the start of next year ____ with my new class.</p>	<p>Is Nancy starting to realise that she has an ownership here of how to teach reading and to include a level of interrogation of the texts from the children's point of view drawing on their experience?</p> <p>Is Nancy developing her own understandings on teaching reading – challenging almost her subject knowledge on interacting with a text? Experiential discussion on literature relating something in the text with something that has happened to the children/empathy with the characters. (Not sure??)</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contextual Knowing Knowledge is uncertain. • Identifying criteria with which to make choices. • You decide what to believe by evaluating evidence. • Thinking through problems. • Integrating knowledge. • Applying knowledge in context. • A central role in constructing knowledge. 	<p>Gosh! ____ this is a massive oversight on my part, I've never considered drawing on the children's personal experience.</p> <p>I've perhaps made links with my own experience____ but never considered giving the children opportunities to draw on theirs. I feel a bit ashamed about that now____ something I need to think about that's for sure. The last book we read, as a class, I'd chosen because they potentially could relate to the characters, but not given them the opportunity to do it. I need to think about how I might do that at the start of next year__ with my new class.</p>	<p>There is uncertainty here – possibly on how this could be incorporated into her teaching-maybe?</p> <p>She has chosen to believe that this is something that needs to be in her practice as she does not disregard the statement as something to be overlooked – her language oversight!</p> <p>Nancy definitely thinks through a problem using the statement as a prompt for the problem.</p>
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Appendix 10

Participant form

<address>

Dear <participant>

This is a follow-up letter to our recent telephone conversation about the Ed.D thesis I am currently working on, and the possibility of you being a participant in the research. The research is looking at the understanding of teaching reading and I would very much like you to be a part of the research. The research would involve you being available for one session of approximately an hour. The session will involve a discussion about teaching reading and a simple task I have developed to enable me to collect the data. I will also digitally record our conversation. The format of the research will be very informal; we just need a quiet place to work.

The research will not involve the collection of personal information on you, your school or pupils you are affiliated with. To ensure your anonymity, I have included a consent form which needs to be completed and signed prior to any research work being undertaken. When the research is completed it is my intention to share the findings of my research with all the participants and to send you a digital copy of the completed thesis.

I look forward to receiving your consent form and working with you on this research project.

Yours sincerely

Rachael Stone

Name of researcher: Rachael Stone

Title: A Study of Primary School Teachers' Understanding and Perceptions of Teaching Reading

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information about the research included in this letter and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.
3. I understand that any personal information that I provide to the researchers will be kept strictly confidential.
4. I agree to take part in the above study.

Name of Participant Date Signature

Researcher Date Signature

Copies: 1 for participant, 1 for researcher

Appendix 11

Sample email correspondence – anonymised

